7-28-2010

# Say "Amen" for the Sistahs: The Rhetoric of Womanist Preaching

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# SAY “AMEN” FOR THE SISTAHS:
# THE RHETORIC OF WOMANIST PREACHING

by

Kimberly Patrice Johnson

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Communication

The University of Memphis

August 2010

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to

all of the womanists and proto-womanists

whose shoulders I proudly stand on.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my family because they planted the seed in me, from the time that I was a little girl, about the importance of an education. After planting that seed, they supported me and encouraged me throughout all of my academic endeavors. To my Mom and Dad, to my brothers and twin sister, to my aunts and uncles, down to my own nieces and nephews, to my cousins, as well as my mentors and friends, thank you for not letting me feel as if I had to walk this journey alone. Your love means the world to me.

To the five womanist preachers reflected in this project and to the womanist scholar whose framework I borrow, thank you for allowing me to analyze your work, ask you questions, email you, and text you. Our rich conversations have helped me to formulate what I say in this dissertation. And, to the "Mother of Womanism," thank you for coining such a beautiful term. I could not have done any of this work without all of you.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to an amazing dissertation committee that pushed me until I could come up with my own answers. Thank you for the tremendous support that you have shown over the years.

Abstract

Johnson, Kimberly Patrice. PhD. The University of Memphis. August 2010. Say "Amen" for the Sistahs: The Rhetoric of Womanist Preaching. Major Professor: Sandra J. Sarkela.

This exploratory study of womanist preaching seeks an answer to the question: how does womanist preaching attempt to transform/adapt the tenets of womanist thought to make it rhetorically viable in the church? And what is gained and lost in this? Through a close reading of various texts, I am able to discover: 1) what rhetorical strategies are employed to advance the womanist position, 2) how sermons function to raise the audience's critical awareness, 3) how the sermons lead to the transformation of the audience, and 4) how to differentiate between the various facets of womanist preaching.

This project identifies five women who are considered exemplars of womanist preaching and analyzes their sermons based on the four different categories or phrased tenets that Stacey Floyd-Thomas uses to represent Alice Walker's four tenets of "womanism"—radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement. The Radical Subjectivity chapter examines Elaine Flake's sermon, "The Power of Enough," and Gina Stewart's sermon, "Enough Is Enough!" to understand what rhetorical strategies are necessary when a preacher needs to encourage women, on their journey toward identity formation, self-love, and self-worth, to make revolutionary changes regarding their current situations. The Traditional Communalism chapter examines how Cheryl Kirk-Duggan's sermon, "Women of the Cloth" is used to pass down cultural knowledge from one generation to the next. The Redemptive Self-Love chapter examines Melva L. Sampson's sermon, "Hell No!" in an effort to understand

what Walker means when she says that we are to love ourselves *regardless*. The Critical Engagement chapter examines Claudette Copeland's sermon, "What Shall We Do for Our Sisters?" to understand how womanist preachers also function as cultural critics and how they engage major questions in multiple disciplines and social contexts. The final chapter serves as a three-part conclusion by providing a contextualized summary and diagram of the various rhetorical strategies, sermonic functions, and methodological approaches used by Flake, Stewart, Kirk-Duggan, Sampson, and Copeland.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## AN INTRODUCTION TO WOMANIST PREACHING

> "While 'black preaching' has traditionally demonstrated a commitment to the eradication of sin and the liberation of the African American community from racism, social injustice, and economic oppression, by and large, it has not included elements that are sensitive to the experiences of African American women. If anything, preaching in the black church has tended to include biblical interpretations that have robbed women of their freedom and authentic personhood. Indeed, some have accommodated, even perpetuated, African American women's oppression and sense of woundedness."[1]

This exploratory study of womanist preaching seeks an answer to the question: how does womanist preaching attempt to transform/adapt the tenets of womanist thought to make it rhetorically viable in the church? And what is gained and lost in this? I define womanist preaching as a homiletical practice, situated in the African American female experience, which serves to challenge and dismantle the patriarchal and religious hegemonic structures that continue to oppress women. This form of preaching seeks to liberate, affirm, and empower women to take action by addressing the experiences of women, countering conventional interpretations of the Bible, and by giving voice to those who are silenced. I hope to discover: 1) what rhetorical strategies are employed to advance the womanist position, 2) how the sermons function to raise the audience's critical awareness, 3) how the sermons lead to the transformation of the audience, and 4) how to differentiate between the various facets of womanist preaching.

This dissertation project evolved from asking Rev. Dr. Claudette Copeland if she is a womanist. She said that even though she does identify herself as a womanist, "[she

[1] Elaine Flake, *God in Her Midst: Preaching Healing to Wounded Women* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2007), xiii-xiv.

does] not think it comes across clearly in [her] preaching."[2] As I listened, I began to wonder if she can identify as a womanist and yet have difficulty projecting womanist rhetoric in the preaching moment, who is to say that other womanists do not share this same struggle? Her response triggered my research question and prompted me to investigate the rhetoric of womanist preaching.

This project, which examines the rhetorical strategies of womanist preaching, is important to the study of rhetoric because all five sermons offer a new rhetorical lens that privileges the experiences of African American women which creates room for healing and liberation. By privileging the experiences of those who are marginalized, the preacher/rhetorician is able to give those who are oppressed a voice by rhetorically positioning them at the center of mainstream society, which changes the normative view. This type of preaching explicitly names and resists the various forms of oppression that plague women, which means that the discourse has a rhetorical agency that allows the preacher to reach those who are oppressed, wounded, and vilified.

A project such as this is also significant to the study of rhetoric because all of the womanist preachers considered in this dissertation are trying to get their audience to identify with particular figures, and not necessarily themselves. According to Kenneth Burke, this concept of identification is essential to rhetorical theory because rhetorical invention, arrangement, style, arguments, figures of speech, and delivery all serve as a means to create identification.[3] Identification makes us consubstantial with other people, groups, or ideas; while at the same time recognizes our individuality. Thus, the things

[2] A personal conversation with Claudette Copeland on October 7, 2007 at the Madison Hotel, Memphis, Tennessee.

[3] Thomas Harte, "The Concept of Identification in the Rhetorical theories of Kenneth Burke and Eric Hoffer," *Sign of the Bull*, 7 no. 2 (1977): 65.

that we hold in common, or the sensations, concepts, images, ideas, and attitudes are what make us consubstantial. We will see that once these womanist preachers are able to get their audience members to identify with them or the biblical character in their sermon, the preachers use that identification as an instrument to motivate and empower their audience to operate out of their own agency in order to change their situation, fix someone else's predicament, or help eliminate a larger societal problem. This project takes a close look at the rhetorical strategies needed to call people to a particular action.

## Overview of Problem

June of 2001 I began working in ministry on a part-time basis as a Children's Ministry Director, which eventually led to full-time employment. I thought that by working at my home church everyone's position would be treated with respect. I thought people would be open enough to take directives from both men and women no matter what age they were. I also thought that by acknowledging my calling, informing the right people at church, and by working in a paid position, getting licensed and ordained would not be an issue for me. It took me seven years to get licensed from the time I accepted my calling in 1998. A local Baptist pastor who had been in ministry for years and heard about the work that I was doing licensed me. I was the first female he had ever licensed. However, my journey toward ordination was much longer because that took a total of twelve years—I was just ordained May of this year. It was not until I changed denominations and became a member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that ordination could become a reality for me.

So far, I have worked at and consulted with a total of five different churches and from these various experiences I have encountered sexism, ageism, racism, and sexual

assault in the workplace of the church. I say this because this is the part of ministry that we neglected to discuss when I was in seminary, yet this is the part of ministry that unfortunately silences women into feelings of self-doubt and inferiority. In order to no longer feel inferior or silenced by self-doubt, we sacrifice who we are and what we believe—self and voice—for the sake of being accepted and fitting in.

I am not the first African American woman to question the silencing of black women. In 1831, Maria W. Stewart asked, "How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?"[4] Stewart urged women to use their influence as mothers to plant seeds of creativity into the minds of their children and kernels of equality to cultivate a pure heart. She must have recognized that the ongoing invisibility and silencing of African American women would maintain their social inequality, and so she encouraged women to redefine themselves by discovering their own identity. As those women began defining themselves and living out their own definitions of who they were and what they considered to be socially acceptable, they also began to gain their visibility and their voice. However, even in the twentieth and twenty-first-centuries, African American women continue to ask, "How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath the load of" racism, sexism, classism, and all other forms of oppression? How long will we have to live out the definitions of who other people say that we are? When do we get to define ourselves and our own lived realities?

## The Significance of Womanism

[4] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1.

*Coining the Term "Womanist"*

Alice Walker questioned these same paradigms of oppression and she credits The Civil Rights Movement as the influence which caused her to redefine her own existence from feminist to womanist. She believes it was the heroism of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., along with the advancements of the Civil Rights Movement, that gave her a reassurance that blacks could become whatever they want and live wherever they want that sparked an awakened faith within her and opened the doorway for her to truly become herself. She says, "What Dr. King promised was not a ranch-style house and an acre of manicured lawn for every black man, but jail and finally freedom. He did not promise two cars for every family, but the courage one day for all families everywhere to walk without shame and unafraid on their own feet."[5] The movement is what gave Walker a reason to look beyond herself and her gender. The movement encouraged her to get involved not only in the life of her community, but also in the world at large. Walker was already a feminist before the Civil Rights Movement. She knew about standing in solidarity with her fellow African American sisters, but she had not yet stood in or fought for the solidarity of the American people as a whole. The movement awakened her understanding in the capacity of the human spirit to be in relationship across racial barriers. The movement gave blacks a sense of community and a purpose. She says, "It gave us heroes, selfless men of courage and strength, for our little boys and girls to follow. It gave us hope for tomorrow. It called us to life. Because we live, it can never die."[6] According to Walker, to fight is to exist and existence means knowing the

[5] Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (Orlando: Hartcourt Inc, 1983), 124-125.

[6] Ibid., 128-129.

difference between what you are and what you were, being capable of looking after yourself both intellectually and financially, knowing when you are being wronged and by whom, being able to protect yourself and the ones you love, being part of the world community, being alert to which part of the community you have joined, and knowing how to change to a different part if that part does not suit you.[7] Walker's fight for freedom included the freedom for her to define her own existence and the freedom of choice to not be forced into supporting one movement over the other.

Womanism originated as a result of feminism's racial divide and the gender divide of the civil rights movement. It was also due to the "refusal to take differences among women seriously that [lay] at the heart of feminism's implicit politics of domination."[8] The moment black women were called to the aid of white feminists to put black males "in their place," black men and black women entered into a crisis relationship with each other.[9] As long as black men are unable to break the strongholds of a white patriarchal society, they will continue to see feminism and feminist movements as a threat to their upward mobility. Likewise, the more women are expected to stay silent in exchange for the advancement of the black male, women's liberation will never be achieved. bell hooks argues that Elizabeth Cady Stanton even suggested, in her article, "Women and Black Men," that "manhood suffrage" was designed to create antagonism between all women and black men.[10] While men sympathized with the cause

[7] Ibid., 125-126.

[8] Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 11.

[9] Walker, 321.

[10] bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 3.

of women's rights activists, they were not willing to risk their own political advancement for the right to vote. As a result, black women were placed between either supporting "women's suffrage" or "manhood suffrage."[11] To align themselves with the women's suffrage movement would partner them with white feminists who were already openly racist against black men. Yet, if they aligned themselves with manhood suffragists, civil rights activists, this would cause them to endorse a patriarchal social order that would inevitably continue to silence women.

Audre Lorde claims, "Women of Color in America have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness."[12]

The 1979 publication of a short story, "Coming Apart," represents the first time that Alice Walker gave utterance to the term *womanist*.[13] Then, in 1983, Walker supplied the meaning of her newly defined womanist existence through the publication of her book, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Walker's definition claims that a womanist is committed to the survival and wholeness of all people regardless of race, class, or gender. Womanists love life, love being responsible, and most importantly love themselves. Stephanie Mitchem, describes Walker's definition as a "conduit for expression of what it means for black women to be women" and what it means for black women to be feminist.[14] Walker's definition captures the inclusive measures by which

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[11] hooks, 3.

[12] Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, The Crossing Press, 1984), 129.

[13] Layli Phillips, *The Womanist Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xix.

[14] Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 55.

women are able to embrace the diversity of all people. Her definition claims that a womanist represents the African American feminist who fights for the natural rights and equality of all people. The focus extends beyond the female gender to include genders of all nationalities in a world that oppresses most people. Implicit in Walker's work is the understanding that feminists isolate themselves, whereas womanists do not—except periodically when it comes to women's health. [15] Furthermore, womanists understand that the Civil Rights Movement will never be over; as long as they live, the fight for equality of all people—not just women—must continue for the sake of future generations. And, womanists acknowledge the call to fashion a blueprint for personal and communal survival. I believe it was this desire to be "committed to survival and wholeness of all people" which eventually motivated African American women, who were Christian theologians and Christian ethicists, to merge Walker's womanist strategies with their theological and ethical understanding of Christianity.

*The Genesis of Womanist Theology*

Womanist theology developed out of the dissatisfaction with feminist theology, which neglected to look at issues of race and class, and black liberation theology (and black preaching), which neglected to consider the issue of gender.[16] African American women needed a theology that would address and confront all of the sins that oppressed them and the black community. In 1985, womanist theology emerged as a methodological perspective of religious scholars. Katie Geneva Cannon, Jacquelyn Grant, and Delores Williams are acknowledged as the founders of womanist theology

[15] Walker, 81.

[16] Elaine Flake, *God in Her Midst: Preaching Healing to Wounded Women* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2007), xiv.

within the American Academy of Religion.[17] These three women questioned what Christianity has to say to oppression. Together, they discovered that economic exploitation, discrimination, racism, sexism, and segregation require African American women to construct their own set of values and virtues that will allow them to conduct themselves with moral integrity in the midst of suffering. As a result, they began to follow in the footsteps of Walker by not letting society define who they are; and so, they redefined themselves within their own theological understanding of Christianity.

*The Relationship to Feminism & Feminist Theology*

Similar to womanists and womanist theologians, feminists and feminist theologians have also questioned the patriarchal understandings of Christianity. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, leader of the nineteenth-century women's rights movement, was an activist for the natural rights of women. Stanton argues, "It is the inalienable right of all to be happy. It is the highest duty of all to seek those conditions in life . . . If that be the heavenly order, is it not our duty to render earth as near to heaven as we may?"[18] Her philosophy of natural rights is centered on the idea that men and women are created equal, with equal rights and privileges. Stanton used both sacred and secular platforms to communicate her message of equality. Likewise, she also questioned the injustices against women in the Bible. Her way of combating religious patriarchy was to become the editor and chief contributing author to both volumes of *The Woman's Bible* (1895,

[17] Stacey M. Floyd (ed.), *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 4.

[18] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "National Woman's Rights Convention Debate, New York City, 1860," in *Man Cannot Speak For Her: Key Texts of the Early Feminists*, Volume II, ed. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (New York: Praeger, 1989), 192.

1898).[19] Additionally, feminist theologians such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, describe feminist theology as a hermeneutical approach that deconstructs the patriarchal paradigms of biblical interpretation and reconstructs those interpretations into non-oppressive paradigms.[20] This tradition recognizes that women's voices have been historically silenced in the church and in the Bible. Feminist theology recovers the biblical heritage of women by its revisionist aim. Feminist theology recovers the forgotten traditions about women. Scholars isolate various biblical texts to determine their proper translation and detect whether the interpretation has been influenced by a patriarchal world view. What differentiates a womanist approach from a feminist approach is that womanism is situated from the standpoint of the African American experience whereas feminism has been traditionally situated from the standpoint of North American middle-class white women. Feminists have historically appropriated their agenda onto African American women, which essentially allows them to maintain power over black women by silencing the voices of black women.

If we follow in the footsteps of Cannon, Grant, and Williams, to question what our religion has to say to our oppression, what happens when we realize that the oppressor is the black church? What can be said when the churches where we worship are intoxicated with patriarchal religious traditions? How can we turn to the church for affirmation, guidance, and strength if the messages that we hear from the pulpit only

[19] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (New York: Europian Publishing Company, 1895-1898); see also, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak For Her: Key Texts of the Early Feminists*, Volume II (New York: Praeger, 1989).

[20] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 20.

seem to liberate and affirm the humanity of our male counterparts? Where do we go to get the information on what strategies to use?

## Rationale & Literature Review

Womanism has undoubtedly been under articulated within the academic disciplines. One reason could be that "since the beginning, the womanist frame has been applied more frequently than it has been written about. That is, more people have employed womanism than have described it."[21] In the past, people approached womanism intuitively rather than analytically which explains why womanist discourse is an important and unexplored emerging area of interest in a number of fields including communication, theology, and preaching; but no significant body of work has been done that researches the verbal expressions of womanist thought. Most womanist scholarship focuses on theory, hermeneutics, methodology or praxis, but not discourse. However, as womanism evolves, womanists are becoming more analytical in their approach so it is time that we start describing how womanists approach rhetoric, thus the need to examine womanist discourse.

*Communication Studies*

From a communication standpoint, the field of rhetoric recognizes a feminist criticism, but has yet to acknowledge a womanist criticism. Marsha Houston and Olga Idriss Davis are the first to expand the canonical world of language and rhetoric to include feminist and womanist discourse, thus providing a "new angle of vision." Their pioneering collection of essays analyzes African American women's communication, acknowledging black women as the voice of authority for our own history. Houston and

[21] Layli Phillips, xxi.

Davis argue that by positioning the "intellectual traditions of African American women *at the center* of [their] analyses . . . produces an angle of vision on Black women's communication that is rare, if not wholly new, in communication studies" because it bears witness to the existence and vitality of a language that mainstream linguistics and communication studies have traditionally ignored, which theorizes experience.[22]

According to Davis, most traditional rhetorical theories reflect a patriarchal bias that values competition, control, and domination. She labels these types of rhetorical theories as rhetoric of patriarchy because they suggest that certain belief systems and experiences are adequate and significant while others are not. Thus, the public sphere (the rhetor's power over the audience) and private spheres (the distancing between the rhetor and the audience that casts the audience as other) are separate in this kind of rhetorical paradigm because the paradigm embraces both domination and control. Davis concurs with Frances Smith Foster that values of domination and control are antithetical to the cultural, intellectual, and rhetorical traditions of African American women.[23] She proposes a discourse of experience that "celebrates the construction of knowledge and meaning of African American women and situates rhetoric as a site of struggle for inclusion and survival. It emphasizes the ongoing interplay between Black women's oppression and Black women's activism within the matrix of domination as a response to human agency."[24] She echoes the words of Earnest Wrage who argued in the late 1940s,

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[22] Marsha Houston and Olga Idriss Davis, *Centering Ourselves: African American Feminist and Womanist Studies of Discourse* (New Jersey: Hampton Press Inc., 2002), 7.

[23] Ibid., 38; See also Francis Smith Foster, *Written by herself: Literary production by African American Women, 1746-1892* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

[24] Houston and Davis, 38.

"oratory is a repository of ideas" and she claims, along with Houston, that Wrage's argument:

> Supports a discourse of experience by illuminating how the power of ideas influences the liberatory dimension of human discourse. Offering a space to engage in the values of self-definition, change, and empowerment, a discourse of experience then, centers African American women's ethnic culture as the central organizing concept for theory and research.[25]

*Theological & Religious Studies*

From a theological standpoint, there is not much information on womanist preaching. Various works will reference a, "womanist hermeneutic and preaching in the black church," or "a womanist reading of (whatever biblical passage)," but rarely will scholarly work combine the words womanist and preaching together to clearly say womanist preaching. Even when I conduct a database search for current articles, out of the hundreds of articles on womanist/womanism, I found only two books and four articles that actually address womanist preaching or a womanist prophetic voice.[26] Why are seminaries and divinity schools teaching Womanist Art, Literature, Media, Music, Musings, Theology, and Ethics, but not producing material that justifies a womanist art of preaching?

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Katie Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1996); Elaine Flake, *God in Her Midst: Preaching Healing to Wounded Women* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2007); Katie Geneva Cannon, "Womanist Interpretation and Preaching in the Black Church," in *Searching the scriptures: A Feminist Introduction 1*, ed. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroads, 1993): 326-337; Emilie M. Townes, "Ethics as an Art of Doing the Work Our Souls Must Have," in *The Arts of Ministry: Feminist-Womanist Approaches*, ed. Christie Cozad Neuger (Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press, 1996), 143-161; Renita Weems, "How Will Our Preaching Be Remembered? A Challenge to See the Bible from a Woman's Perspective," in *The African American Pulpit 9*, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 26-29; Teresa Fry Brown, "A Womanist Model for Proclamation of the Good News," The African American Lectionary, http://www.theafricanamericanlectionary.org/PopupCulturalAid.asp?LRID=73 (accessed April 24, 2010).

Additionally, a few colleges have published womanist journals to further educate people on the importance of womanist thought. For example, the University of Georgia's Institute for African-American Studies published four volumes of *Womanist Theory and Research* and Mills College currently publishes *The Womanist, Women of Color Journal*. Renita Weems, a womanist scholar and Vice President of Academic Affairs at American Baptist College, who has also been acknowledged as one of America's top 15 preachers by *Ebony Magazine*, has a womanist blog, called somethingwithin.com, and her topics range from current events to theological matters. Weems also serves as the moderator of the womanist listserv. In addition to journals, blog sites, and listservs, numerous books and articles have been written about womanist thought and womanist theology within the last 25 years, which is how womanist theological studies is now able to critically examine black preaching.

*The Problem with Black Preaching*

Womanism has just recently begun to question the role of preaching in the black church. In its questioning, it developed a connection between womanist theology and black preaching, which has now led towards what can be called, womanist preaching. However, I find it necessary to first explain this connection to black preaching since I have already made clear its connection to feminist theology.

Black preaching emerged out of the invisible church, during slavery, in the 1600s. This religious institution represented the only means by which blacks could exercise leadership and power. Both the role of the preacher and the act of preaching were held in highest regards and preaching became the tool that enslaved black leaders used to

influence their fellow laborers.[27] This tool was used, and continues to be used, to exalt "the word of God above all other authorities."[28] Cannon claims,

> Black preaching is a running commentary on scripture passages, showing how the Bible is an infinite resource that provides hearers with ways in word and deed for overcoming oppressive situations. . . .
>
> . . . The sermon is a combination of serious exegesis and imaginative elaboration of the stories in the Pentateuch, the sayings in wisdom literature, the prophetic writings, and the New Testament. It is an unhampered play of theological fantasy and at the same time an acknowledgment of the cultural maturity and religious sophistication of traditional themes.[29]

The black preacher mediates between God and the congregations in order to instruct the listeners on how to interpret, define, and solve life's problems. However, the problem that African American women have found with black preaching is that the black preaching tradition has not taken seriously the sin of sexism. Elaine Flake suggests that black preaching has in fact perpetuated women's oppression by its use of biblical interpretations that rob women of their freedom and authentic personhood.[30]

*The Emergence of Womanist Preaching*

From a homiletical standpoint, three women have examined the characteristics of womanist preaching: Katie Cannon, Donna Allen, and Elaine Flake. Cannon's work represents the first attempt of systematically identifying womanist interpretive strategies that are necessary for the preaching moment. She creates a womanist hermeneutic for preaching that focuses on the arguments, or what Aristotle calls *logos*, also known as

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[27] Katie Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1996), 115.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 115-116.

[30] Elaine Flake, *God in Her Midst: Preaching Healing to Wounded Women* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2007), xiii.

logical appeals, which represents the rational arguments that a speaker invents to prove, or at least appear to prove, the speaker's position. [31] Allen even claims that Cannon is mostly concerned with the logos—the words, content, and reasoning—of black preaching because Cannon "proposes a womanist hermeneutic [that] would both reveal and challenge patriarchal teaching[s] of biblical interpretation in Black preaching."[32] Cannon argues that "the essential task of a womanist hermeneutic consists in analyzing how black sermonic texts 'participate in creating or sustaining oppressive or liberating theoethical values and sociopolitical practices.'"[33]

*Katie Cannon*. According to Cannon, this genre of sacred rhetoric "requires sacred orators to be responsive to the emotional, political, psychic, and intellectual implications of our message. . . . Therefore, we must identify the qualities of an 'ideal' Black churchwoman and a 'realized' Christian woman."[34] A womanist hermeneutic "challenges conventional biblical interpretations that characterize African American Women as 'sin-bringing Eve,' 'wilderness-whimpering Hagar,' 'henpecking Jezebel,' 'whoring Gomer,' 'prostituting Mary Magdalene,' and 'conspiring Sapphira.' . . . It eliminate[es] the negative and derogatory female portraiture in Black preaching" by exposing the "phallocentric" concepts embedded in Black preaching and "encouraging an

[31] George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1963), 97.

[32] Donna Allen, "Toward a Womanist Homiletic: Katie Cannon, Alice Walker, and Emancipatory Proclamation" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2005), 9.

[33] Cannon, 114; see Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 9.

[34] Cannon, 120.

ethic of resistance."[35] Womanist preachers have to be "responsive to the emotional, political, psychic, and intellectual implication of our message" and maintain "a balanced tension between the accuracy of the spoken word—organization, language, fluidity, and style—and the expressed political aim of our sermonic content"[36] Cannon claims, "A womanist hermeneutics seeks to place sermonic texts in the real-life context of the culture that produced them,"[37] Through this examination of the rhetorical situation, the preacher must educate the audience by providing "visions of liberation" that transcend oppression. The preacher can use imagery that will "invite the congregation to share in dismantling patriarchy by artfully and deftly guiding the congregation through the rigors of resisting the abjection and marginalization of women."[38] A womanist hermeneutics also "removes men from the 'normative' center and women from the margins."[39]

*Donna Allen*. Allen uses Cannon's womanist hermeneutical methodology outlined in "Roundtable Discussion: Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective" and "Womanist Interpretation and Preaching in the Black Church," in *Katie's Canon*, as her method for critiquing sermons. She claims that Cannon is mostly concerned with the logos—the words, content, and reasoning—of black preaching because Cannon "proposes a womanist hermeneutic [that] would both reveal and challenge patriarchal teaching[s] of biblical interpretation in Black preaching."[40] She

[35] Ibid., 114, 119.

[36] Ibid., 120.

[37] Ibid., 121.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Allen, 9.

notes, on several different occasions, that Cannon's womanist typology is influenced by the convergence of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist hermeneutical approach and Isaac R. Clark's work on black preaching, but that Cannon adds emphasis to race and class in order to formulate a womanist interpretation.

According to Allen, The following list identifies Cannon's central homiletical concerns for a womanist analysis:

> 1. Eliminate "negative and derogatory female" images. Identify and refute the "androcentric, phallocentric . . . stereotypes that are dehumanizing, debilitating, and prejudicial to African-American women."
>
> 2. Address the marginalization of women in the biblical text and context. "A Womanist hermeneutic seeks to place sermonic texts in the real-life context of the culture that produced them. . . . Images used throughout the sermon can invite the congregation to share in dismantling patriarchy," and create an emancipatory response.
>
> 3. Eliminate discriminatory language and the marginalizing of women characters in the sermon that in the biblical text are central figures. To challenge the sermonic retelling of the biblical story in such a manner that women are inferior to men. "What happens to the African-American female children when Black preachers use the Bible to attribute marvelous happenings and unusual circumstances to an all-male cast of characters?"
>
> 4. Monitor the impact of images to empower women and create "an ethic of resistance" to oppression. "As Womanist theologians, what can we do to counter the negative real-world consequences of sexist wording that brothers and sisters propagate in the guise of Christian piety and virtue?"
>
> 5. Womanist hermeneutic considers the socio-cultural context of the preaching event. Examine the words of the preacher and the context of the community. What are the leadership roles of women within the church community? "This practice removes men from the normative center and women from the margins."
>
> 6. African-American clergywomen must have praxis of resistance. The faith communities' response to the "proclaimed word" is the emancipatory praxis.[41]

[41] Allen, 14.

Cannon's first item serves as an example of how one might refute the masculine stereotypes and demeaning images of women that seem to dominate both the biblical text and black preaching. Cannon's second point invites preachers to insert women into the biblical text as a means of moving women from the fringes of society into the center of mainstream society by giving women a voice and a presence in the Bible. Cannon's third matter explains how one would go about reconstructing the biblical text to retell the story in a manner that affirms women. Cannon's fourth item emphasizes that the preacher must guard against the negative images of the text and then counter those images with empowering images. Cannon's fifth point serves as a necessary reminder that it is the responsibility of preachers not only to question and dismantle the patriarchal and oppressive forces that exist in the world, but also to question and dismantle those same oppressions that exist within their own religious institution. Finally, Cannon's last item explains that the proclaimed message represents an emancipatory praxis because it is a discursive act of resistance and liberation. Cannon explicates this point by arguing that "The preacher is obliged and expected to show the listeners how to 'trace out the logic of liberation that can transform patriarchal oppression.'"[42] In other words, the preacher must help the listeners recognize the transformative aspect, or rhetorical agency,[43] of the preached message. Rhetorical agency is the power that guides readers or listeners to a

[42] Cannon, 121.

[43] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell defines rhetorical agency through a five-part series of propositions. She claims that agency: "(1) is communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic; (2) is '"invented"' by authors who are points of articulation; (3) emerges in artistry or craft; (4) is effected through form; and (5) is perverse, that is, inherent, protean, ambiguous, open to reversal." See Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Agency: Promiscuous and Protean," Paper presented at the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies 2003 Conference, 3.

particular end. Therefore, the rhetorical agency of the preached messaged lies in the prophetic words, gestures, and the overall performance of the sermon.

Even though Allen does not use the terminology of rhetorical agency, she does allude to what rhetorical agency looks like in black preaching when she discusses the communal act of preaching. Allen claims that Cannon's rhetorical criticism of African American preaching suggests that more critical dialogue is needed between the preacher and the congregation. She says:

> . . . [I]t is necessary for the preacher and congregation to develop an understanding that part of the preaching event is communal reflection. The intent of this approach is to create opportunity for conversation among listeners and preachers, so the rhetoric of the sermon is examined and the emancipatory praxis is determined in response to the Word proclaimed. Listeners from pulpit and pew, together, shape the faith praxis [the practices of faith] and sacred rhetoric of the community. . . . In these conversations, all participants must be willing to learn new skills of dialogue, analysis and theology, and be willing to engage critically the rhetoric of the sermon. . . In the Black preaching tradition, the preaching event is a dialogue with the audience and therefore a communal art form wherein all the artists (meaning the preacher and congregation) can fine tune their skills.[44]

Preaching has a rhetorical agency that makes it communal and participatory, invented, artistic, effected through change, and as Karlyn Kohrs Campbell says, "perverse" at the same time. Or, as Cannon says, "preaching . . . is both sacred and profane, active and passive, life-giving and death-dealing."[45] The preaching event is a time of shared reflection where the preacher, the congregation, tradition, language, and culture all work together to shape and place limitations on "new meaning." The preacher speaks not as the originator of the message, but as the point of articulation or presumed mouthpiece for God. The preacher has to negotiate, during delivery, all of the available means of persuasion and discriminates when to use logical appeals, emotional appeal, and ethical

[44] Allen, 7-8.

[45] Cannon, 120.

appeals. Then, the words that are conveyed through the message have the power to guide people toward a particular end, a particular understanding or belief. Finally, preaching becomes perverted when it demeans, belittles, or oppresses any person or group of people.

At the same time Allen praises Cannon's work towards identifying a womanist homiletic, Allen also identifies some problems. Allen claims that Cannon's womanist critique is not exhaustive because it only focuses on imagery, biblical interpretation, and the emancipatory praxis of the preached message as they relate to women. Furthermore, Allen points out that Cannon only examines the linguistic violence—the derogatory words that demean women—used in sacred rhetoric; whereas, Clarice Martin explores the linguistic sexism—the instances in the Bible where women were removed from the text. Therefore, Allen proposes that a rigorous womanist critique would call for a combination of both Cannon's and Martin's hermeneutical paradigms.

Allen believes that a womanist homiletic must reflect all three of the Aristotelian proofs: logos, ethos, and pathos; whereas, Cannon only focuses on logos. Allen links logos, pathos, and ethos to Walker's womanist definition and she uses this connection to help her expand Cannon's womanist heuristic in order to develop her own womanist preaching typology. In terms of logos, Allen makes some rhetorical clarifications by inserting into her typology that womanist rhetoric must challenge heterosexism and homophobia along with all of the constructs that inform human sexuality.[46] Allen also explicitly challenges womanists to use inclusive language when discussing the Trinity by using non-gendered or gender-inclusive terms in their God talk.

[46] Allen, 21.

In regards to pathos, Allen notes that pathos is not only created verbally, it can be created through performance by using gestures, dance, or movement as a way to embody the sermon. She claims that effective pathos in preaching makes it hard for the congregation to resist connecting with the sermon and that this connection is what leads to an emancipatory response from the congregants to the preached Word.

In relation to ethos, Allen recognizes that both internal and external factors help to create one's credibility. So, when it comes to preaching, the rhetoric and knowledge of the preacher yield internal ethos while the preacher's credentials, ministerial position, popularity, celebrity status, and the actual invitation extended by a senior pastor to preach in their pulpit (for those preaching in a pulpit that is not their own) all contribute to the preacher's external ethos. Allen also acknowledges that ethos can be created through kinesthesia (movement) and shamanism (embodiment). According to Allen, a person who creates ethos through movement would be called a "conjurer" because conjurers magically transform reality through ritual speech and action. Likewise, a person who creates ethos through embodiment would be called a "shaman" because a shaman has the ability to embody the emotional and social problems of the people.[47] Together, Allen uses these findings along with the womanist rhetorical analysis of Cannon and Walker's definition of womanism to create her own typology of an emancipatory praxis for womanist preaching:

1. Equip listeners with a systematic process to critically engage the rhetoric of the sermon;

2. The use of non-gendered or gender-inclusive language in our God talk;

[47] Ibid., 35-36.

3. A non-gendered language for traditional Trinitarian language;

4. An emphasis on the humanity of Christ while not focusing on the gender of Jesus;

5. The adopting of a rhetorical stance to make an effective use of Christian rhetoric;

6. The effective use of multisensory and kinesthetic communication;

7. The Divine presence manifested in shamanistic and conjuring oratory that is performed identity, conflict resolution, and homeopathic;

8. An atonement theology that takes seriously an African-American historical experience of sexual exploitation and forced surrogacy that, therefore, affirms the ministerial vision of Jesus' life as redemptive and not his surrogacy in crucifixion; and

9. The dismantling of heterosexism and homophobia inclusive of an affirmation of the diversity of human sexuality.[48]

For Allen, a womanist homiletic considers both the rhetorical and performative aspects of womanist preaching, which is evidenced in her sermonic analyses of Prathia Hall, a self-proclaimed womanist theologian and ethicists. Even though Allen makes the claim that she is not performing an Aristotelian analysis of Hall's sermons, this is exactly what she does throughout the dissertation. The only difference is that she moves beyond the terminology of artistic proofs to discuss elements of: association, disassociation, bringing into view, kinesthesia, conjuration, and shamanism. Allen defines logos as "the words, the content, and the line of reasoning in proclamation;" pathos as "the emotional identifications wrought in preaching;" and ethos as "the embodied communication that devolves from the very person and presence of the preacher."[49] Although she later

[48] Ibid., 89.

[49] Ibid., ix.

abandons the logos, ethos, pathos terminology, all of her arguments either explicitly or implicitly point back to one of these three forms of artistic proofs.[50]

*Elaine Flake*. Flake attempts to develop a more holistic womanist typology by not only challenging the biblical text, but also by challenging the oppressive practices of the black church. She argues from the standpoint of a pastor, that black preaching has perpetuated women's oppression by its use of biblical interpretations that rob women of their freedom and authentic personhood.[51] She says, "There can be no real discussion of the eradication of oppression for African Americans without also admitting that one of the oppressors of African American women is the African American Church."[52] She claims, since womanist theology came about due to the dissatisfaction of feminist and black liberation, "If [womanist] preaching is to truly reach the hearts, minds, and souls of African American women, preachers must employ an analysis of Scripture that reconstructs the Word of God in ways that are liberating to women as well as men and that reflects the totality of the African American experience."[53] This type of preaching must also "expose and denounce the horrors of race and gender oppression and equip the entire congregation with spiritual and pragmatic strategies that will empower and heal."[54]

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[50] *Association* rhetoric "put[s] together Christian understandings with images of lived experience;" *Disassociation* rhetoric "employs familiar rhetorical systems, such as dialectic, antithesis, opposition, and at times, perhaps even charitable giggling [to emphasize our] peculiar double consciousness—a consciousness of being-saved and a consciousness of being-in-the-world;" and finally, *bringing into view* rhetoric brings attention "to understandings of God, of God's mysterious purposes, and of unseen wonders of grace in human lives" all work to create pathos. See Allen, 28-29; see also David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (New York: Hartcourt Brace & Company, 1983), 41-42.

[51] Elaine Flake, *God in Her Midst: Preaching Healing to Wounded Women* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2007), xiii.

[52] Ibid., vii.

[53] Ibid., xiv.

[54] Ibid., 12.

According to Flake, womanist preaching has ten important characteristics. Preaching to heal requires the preacher to:

1. Affirm
2. Show sensitivity
3. Honor tradition
4. Liberate
5. Present Jesus as an Advocate for women
6. Acknowledge African ancestry
7. Avoid male-bashing
8. Tell the truth
9. Inspire action
10. Think outside the box[55]

Flake's typology is a combination of hermeneutical and practical concerns. The first six suggestions address an interpretive methodology and the last three refer to practical considerations. Flake urges womanist preachers to avoid male-bashing because the "devaluation of African American men or any human being in order to affirm and heal African American women is antithetical to womanist preaching."[56] While discouraging "bashing," she encourages womanists to tell the truth about some black men in their preaching because "a womanist interpretation cannot ignore, justify, or excuse the abusive and misogynist behavior of some African American men."[57] Furthermore, like

[55] Ibid., 13-21.

[56] Ibid, 18.

[57] Ibid., 19.

Allen and Cannon, she wants preachers to inspire action. She claims that womanist preaching is "corrective and should elicit a positive, constructive, and life-changing response from the targeted community. It must not only proclaim the Word of God by communicating the healing contained therein, but the women and men who hear the gospel must perceive it as truth and be motivated to be '"transformed by the renewing of [their] minds (Romans 12:2)."[58] Finally, she pushes womanist preachers to think outside the box because the work it takes to eradicate "traditional notions advanced by preaching that has underpinned and even contributed to African American women's oppression requires preachers to renew their own minds."[59] Preachers cannot get caught-up in conventional interpretations if their task is to truly liberate all oppressed people.

Even though Flake clearly outlines that her womanist preaching typology only has ten characteristics, I believe she should have used her six points from the last few pages of her book to make her list more complete—completed in the sense that her list fully matches the claims that she makes in her book. In other words, based on her arguments, her typology should reflect the following:

1. Affirm
2. Show sensitivity
3. Honor tradition
4. Liberate
5. Present Jesus as an Advocate for women
6. Acknowledge African ancestry

[58] Ibid., 20.

[59] Ibid.

7. Avoid male-bashing
8. Tell the truth
9. Inspire action
10. Think outside the box
11. *Give women a positive presence in the Bible*
12. *Identify all forms of oppression in the Bible, our religious practices and the larger community*
13. *Address violence on systematic levels*
14. *Employ methodologies that identify toxic relationships*
15. *All sermons do not need to address the issues of women*
16. *Convey the promise of hope, joy, and wholeness*[60]

Flake needs to include items eleven through sixteen because these are important claims that give preachers, along with her readers, a clearer understanding of what constitutes womanist preaching. She asserts, "It is the responsibility of womanist theologians to . . . find in the Bible a divine hope and promise that consistently affirm[s] African American women's humanity and gives them a positive presence in the text."[61] Her typology mentions affirmation, but it neglects to address, in items one through ten, this need to give women a positive presence in the Bible. Next, she stresses, "It is important for preachers, pastors, and theologians to identify the negative and oppressive aspects of our culture, political realities, and church traditions and practices."[62] Flake maintains the necessity to not just critique the Bible or the theological language of

[60] The additional material was extracted from Flake, 91-93.

[61] Flake, 91.

[62] Ibid., 92.

sermons, but to examine the culture that we live in, our political realities, as well as our church traditions and practices. Therefore, this needs to be reflected in her typology. She also emphasizes that "Black women's experiences with gender inequality, racism, rape, and other forms of violence must be addressed on systemic levels and must, therefore, be on the church's overall agenda."[63] Additionally, Flake contends that "Those who preach must continually seek to employ insightful and creative methodologies that inspire women and men to identify toxic relationships, self-defeating attitudes, and self-destructive behaviors."[64] Womanist preaching must not only inspire people to action through transformation, but it must also carry the burden of helping people to recognize their own toxic relationships, attitudes, and behaviors. Finally, she explicitly sets the record straight by stating, "Every sermon is not required to address 'women's issues,' but every sermon is required to set the stage for divine encounter and a message that conveys the promise of hope, joy, and wholeness."[65] This critique is vital because all womanist sermons do not have to be about women, nor does the central character in the biblical text have to be a woman; which is why it is detrimental to have some message of hope, joy, and wholeness because if the sermon is not going to specifically bring wholeness to a particular woman with a certain issue, it must at least bring wholeness to the larger community of believers.

Even though everyone might not morally agree with or subscribe to womanism or womanist preaching, womanist theology and womanist preaching are assumed by a growing number of women clergy. Likewise, womanist discourse is beginning to make

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., 93.

its way into the field of communication. Unfortunately, in the areas of preaching, public address, and rhetorical criticism, we are lacking scholarship on this intellectual tradition. Ultimately, this topic is worth studying for three reasons: 1) so that the academy and especially communication programs along with women's studies and women's history programs can understand and learn about a group of African American women that has been systematically ignored until the late twentieth-century; 2) so that rhetoricians and preachers can develop a deeper understanding of how womanist preachers use womanist rhetorical strategies to move their audience to a particular end; and 3) so that audiences will clearly be able to recognize when they are hearing womanist preaching. The growing body of womanist work in other disciplines demands that womanist rhetoric be studied, identified, and codified.

## Methodology

Once again, this exploratory study of womanist preaching seeks an answer to the question: how does womanist preaching attempt to transform/adapt the tenets of womanist thought to make it rhetorically viable in the church? And what is gained and lost in this? In particular, are these womanist preachers rhetorically advancing the womanist position or are they reinforcing traditional gender roles? If they are advancing the womanist position, then my question is how? I hope to discover: 1) what rhetorical strategies are employed to advance the womanist position, 2) how the sermons function to raise the audience's critical awareness, 3) how the sermons lead to the transformation of the audience, and 4) how to differentiate between the various facets of womanist preaching.

This project identifies five women who are considered exemplars of womanist preaching and analyzes their sermons based on the four different categories or phrased tenets that Stacey Floyd-Thomas uses to represent Walker's four tenets of "womanism"—radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement—in her anthology, *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*. Radical subjectivity refers to the ways in which women have been able to subvert forced hegemonic identities of a racist-sexist-classist world. It is the "radicality" of affirming self and speaking truth to power in the face of formidable odds.[66] Traditional communalism speaks to the ways that cultural traditions have nurtured and supported Black women on our individual and collective journey towards liberation.[67] Redemptive self-love means to unashamedly love self and stand up for self. Finally, critical engagement calls for a critical evaluation of society's cultural norms. This cultural critique engages major questions in a variety of disciplines and social contexts.[68] I apply Floyd-Thomas's conceptual framework to the art of preaching and use a close textual analysis to uncover what the preachers are actually doing in hopes of determining whether or not the sermons really do transform/adapt womanist thought.

## Chapter Overview

The first chapter of this dissertation has presented the research question— how does womanist preaching attempt to transform/adapt the tenets of womanist thought to make it rhetorically viable in the church? And what is gained and lost in this?—that fuels

[66] Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (ed.), *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 8.

[67] Ibid., 9.

[68] Ibid., 10.

this exploratory study, background information that defines the term *womanist*, an explanation of the significance of womanism that details the coining of the term, the genesis of womanist theology, and the relationship to feminism and feminist theology; a rationale and literature review that justifies the need for more research and discusses the emergence of womanist preaching by examining what scholars and preachers claim should be the goal(s) of womanist preaching; and a description of the methodological approach to this project.

Chapters two through five will look at specific examples of womanist preaching that reflect the four different categories that Floyd-Thomas uses to represent the tenets of womanism as described by Alice Walker. Although womanist preaching does not have to address women's issues, all five of the sermons considered in this project specifically focus on women and the scriptures are taken from different versions of the Bible depending on the preacher. Each chapter begins by defining its womanist tenet; followed by a close reading of a sermon; then I discuss the major womanist characteristics that the preacher evokes; afterward, I juxtapose the key rhetorical strategies with one of the previous sermons. This critical textual analysis will help me to uncover what rhetorical strategies the preachers are using and to determine what rhetorical patterns, if any, may be necessary in sermons that attempt to fight against oppressive forces. This type of analysis will also reveal how the sermons function, how sermons raise audience awareness, the methods by which sermons are able to transform the beliefs and behaviors of the audience, and what is gained or lost in adapting the tenets of womanist thought to the preaching moment. Additionally, a close textual analysis will allow me to understand

how preachers train their audience as well as how audiences know whether or not they are hearing a womanist message.

Chapter Two: Radical Subjectivity examines Elaine Flake's sermon, "The Power of Enough," and Gina Stewart's sermon, "Enough Is Enough!" to understand what rhetorical strategies are necessary when a preacher needs to encourage women, on their journey toward identity formation, self-love, and self-worth, to make revolutionary changes regarding their current situations. Flake is the Co-pastor of the Greater Allen AME Cathedral with her husband, Floyd Flake, and Co-founder of the Allen Christian School in Jamaica, New York. Her sermon demonstrates radical subjectivity because it addresses the course of action that a woman had to take in order to affirm herself. Likewise, Stewart, who is the Senior Pastor of Christ Missionary Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, also demonstrates radical subjectivity and uses the same scripture as Flake. Since both sermons use the same text, I will be able to do a comparative analysis that explains the key methodologies used by the preachers.

Chapter Three: Traditional Communalism examines how Cheryl Kirk-Duggan's sermon, "Women of the Cloth" is used to pass down cultural knowledge from one generation to the next. In other words, how do preachers privilege knowledge and what rhetorical strategies are necessary when a preacher needs to protect, nurture, sustain, liberate, reunite or even bring a community back together on a particular issue? Cheryl Kirk-Duggan is a Professor of Theology & Women's Studies, as well as the Director of Women's Studies at Shaw University Divinity School in Raleigh, North Carolina. Her sermon demonstrates traditional communalism by addressing the skewed traditions and circumstances that tend to cripple women in ministry and the need for discernment in

recognizing the crippling spirits. I will do a comparative analysis to help differentiate between traditional communalism sermons and radical subjectivity sermons.

Chapter Four: Redemptive Self-Love examines Melva L. Sampson's sermon, "Hell No!" in an effort to understand what Walker means when she says that we are to love ourselves *regardless*. As we will see in this sermon, regardless does not come without a price. Sampson helps us recognize what rhetorical strategies are necessary for a preacher who needs to confront commonly held stereotypes. Sampson is the former Interim Director of Women in Theology and Ministry at Candler School of Theology, Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, where she has currently just finished her first year as a PhD student in the Graduate Division of Religion. Her sermon, "Hell No!" demonstrates redemptive self-love because it expresses the courage of a woman who refused to become objectified by her husband. My comparative analysis will differentiate between redemptive self-love sermons and radical subjectivity sermons.

Chapter Five: Critical Engagement examines Claudette Copeland's sermon, "What Shall We Do for Our Sisters?" to understand how womanist preachers also function as cultural critics and how they engage major questions in multiple disciplines and social contexts. Copeland is Co-pastor and Co-founder of New Creation Christian Fellowship of San Antonio, Texas with her husband, Bishop David M. Copeland. She is also the Founder and President of Destiny Ministries, a national and international ministry that empowers women and young girls. Her sermon demonstrates critical engagement because it addresses the cultural misconception that breast cancer only affects the person (or woman) that has it. Copeland explains that breast cancer affects everyone. The effects of the disease do not discriminate; everyone is joined together in

the struggle against cancer. Additionally, I will compare critical engagement sermons to traditional communalism sermons in order to help us differentiate between the rhetorical strategies used in both forms of preaching.

Chapter Six: The final chapter will serve as a three-part conclusion to this project by providing a contextualized summary and diagram of the various rhetorical strategies, sermonic functions, and methodological approaches used by Flake, Stewart, Kirk-Duggan, Sampson, and Copeland. The second part of this chapter will use the information gathered from chapters two through five to answer the research question—how does womanist preaching attempt to transform/adapt the tenets of womanist thought to make it rhetorically viable in the church? And what is gained and lost in this? I hope to explain how womanist preaching transforms/adapts the tenets of womanist thought and what is gained or lost through this adaptation. The third part of this chapter will make suggestions for future research. I anticipate being able to say what the sermons teach us about the limits and possibilities of womanism more generally. In the end, people will ask who can be a womanist preacher and do race, gender, and religion matter? By definition, Alice Walker's womanism requires essentialism but the broader understanding of womanism in the religious academy leaves room to argue that race, gender, and religion are not determining factors, which means that the determinant must be in the discourse.

Appendix A, "Women of the Cloth" Sermon, provides a complete transcription of Cheryl Kirk-Duggan's sermon that is used as the rhetorical artifact for chapter three. Appendix B, "What Shall We Do For Our Sister?" Sermon, provides the complete transcription of Claudette Copeland's sermon, the rhetorical artifact for chapter five.

Let us begin this exploratory study by examining the first phrased tenet of womanism, what scholars say about the tenet, and then by analyzing two sermons.

## CHAPTER TWO

## RADICAL SUBJECTIVITY

> *[A] process that emerges as Black females in the nascent phase of their identity development come to understand agency as the ability to defy a forced naiveté in an effort to influence the choices made in one's life and how conscientization incites resistance against marginality . . .*[1]

This chapter examines the meaning of radical subjectivity, the term Stacey Floyd-Thomas uses to describe the first tenet of womanism, and the application of it in a sermon. First, I will begin by explaining how Stacey Floyd-Thomas defines this term, how her colleagues define this term, followed by how Alice Walker originally defined this first tenet of womanism. Second, I will offer a close reading of two sermons that were delivered by womanist preachers who illuminate the meaning of radical subjectivity from a vantage point that seeks to liberate self, community, and those outside of the community. "The Power of Enough," by Elaine Flake, and "Enough is Enough!" by Gina Stewart, use the same scripture, Genesis 29:31-35, the story of Leah, to challenge women to learn how to resist their own marginalization by learning how to affirm, love, and value themselves. These two sermons move the audience to operate out of their own agency. Following the sermon analysis, this chapter will juxtapose the key rhetorical strategies from Flake's sermon with Stewart's sermon to uncover any rhetorical patterns that are consistent in radical subjectivity sermons.

*Defining Radical Subjectivity*

Radical Subjectivity, the term Stacey Floyd-Thomas uses to describe the first tenet of womanism, expresses woman's ability to affirm her authentic self in the midst of oppression. I understand it as the journey toward identity formation, the journey toward

[1] Floyd-Thomas, 16.

self-love, and the journey toward valuing self because it represents the process in which identity is formed. It also speaks to the ways in which women are able to subvert domination. According to Floyd-Thomas, "the radicality of affirming the authentic self-hood lies in Black women's ability to speak truth to power even in the face of formidable odds."[2] Exercising the right to speak or speaking truth to power "says something about the power and value of authorizing one's own perspective. To be author of our own reality is to claim the value of our experience, to trust our ability to reason and reflect, and to accept ourselves as we really are."[3] Therefore, identity formation under the guise of radical subjectivity carries with it an acceptance of self, a love of self, and an affirmation of self that allows women to move from being a victim to being a victor through self-transformation. Radical subjectivity requires women to operate out of their own agency.

According to Katie Cannon, this first tenet of womanism challenges the "masterminds of intellectual imperialism" who classify the work of Black women scholars in the theological academy as questionable, anecdotal evidence.[4] For her, radical subjectivity does not allow anecdotal evidence to be banished to the margins of religious knowledge. Radical subjectivity is the telling of our subjective truths. Carol Duncan argues that Walker's radicalism is rooted in her assessment of the womanishness quality. Duncan claims:

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[2] Ibid., 8.

[3] Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson, *Saved from Silence: Finding Women's Voice in Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 12.

[4] Katie Cannon, "Structured Academic Amnesia: As If This True Womanist Story Never Happened," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 19, 27.

> Walker affirmed an important experience in black girlhood, namely, stepping outside of the boundaries of expected gender normative behavior in familial and community contexts, in which obedience (read silence) and compliance (read silence again) were highly valued and seen as effective child-rearing practices that reflected positively on the child's mother.[5]

Similarly, Debra Mubashshir Majeed advocates a broadening of boundaries by challenging the ways in which womanism privileges Christianity. She argues that womanist discourse must encompass religious plurality. For Majeed, radical subjectivity is the emergence of a Muslim Womanist Philosophy that gives "public voice, material expression, and legitimacy" to the embodied experiences and knowledge of "African American Muslims."[6] Like Cannon, her form of radical subjectivity appears to be a resistance to silence or a "refusal to be banished to the periphery of religious knowledge."[7]

In the same way, Diana Hayes argues that Black Catholic women suffer from a quadruple oppression of "race, class, gender, and religious faith."[8] She confesses that she straddles in and out of the Black community, the university/scholarly setting, and the Roman Catholic Church. She says women who challenge the teaching of the Church are viewed as radical, sometimes as heretic, and never fully as authentically Catholic.[9] Her

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[5] Carol B. Duncan, From "Force-Ripe" to "Womanish/ist:" Black Girlhood and African Diasporan Feminist Consciousness in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 31.

[6] Debra Mubashshir Majeed, "Womanism Encounters Islam: A Muslim Scholar Considers the Efficacy of a Method Rooted in the Academy and the Church," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 44.

[7] Cannon, 26.

[8] Diana L. Hayes, "Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made: The Making of a Catholic Womanist Theologian," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 66.

[9] Ibid., 70.

understanding of radical subjectivity appears to be reflected in her efforts to affirm self, authenticate self, and to legitimize her work as a Black female professional by removing the masks of ignorance that covers the three communities that she finds herself in, and then by challenging those communities with a different perspective. According to Hayes, who views herself as an "outsider-within:"[10]

> Black Catholic women can bring to the forefront of womanist dialogue images of Black women that contradict the dominant perspective, women such as Hagar, abused and misused by both her master and her mistress, yet taught by God how to survive in the wilderness as African American women had to do for centuries in this land. Hagar models strength, endurance, and the passionate love of our foremothers for those entrusted to their care. They did what they had to do not simply to survive but to ensure that their communities would also survive and be prepared for whatever future might come.[11]

I believe the narratives of biblical characters who contradict the dominant perspective are stories that help describe the essence of Floyd-Thomas' term, radical subjectivity. Women who come fact-to-face with patriarchy and other forms of oppression, who are able to reach deep within themselves in a manner that affirms self and then change their situation or at least change their perception of their situation demonstrates radical subjectivity and creates agency.

When Alice Walker discusses the first tenet of her womanist definition, she explicitly states that a womanist is:

> 1. From womanish. (Opp. Of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one.

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[10] Ibid., 68; See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 11-13.

[11] Hayes, 67.

> Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.[12]

This first tenet immediately qualifies who can fit into the womanist category by attaching race and color to the term "feminist." Next, we gain an understanding of womanist behavior. To be a womanist is to express "outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior" and to be "responsible," "in charge," and serious" at the same time. Here, Walker applies these characteristics to a girl who is "trying to be grown," which expands our understanding that womanism has a revelatory component that pushes girls/women to resist conforming to the dominant social structures. Ultimately, Walker's and Floyd-Thomas's perspectives on womanism are rooted in identity formation of young girls and women, and how one comes to understand and affirm her own ability to speak, think, and act on behalf of self.

**Rhetorical Analysis of Elaine Flake's sermon, "The Power of Enough"**

> *When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."*
>
> *She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon.*
>
> *Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi.*
>
> *She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will Praise the Lord." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.*
>
> **Genesis 29:31-35, NIV**

Elaine Flake's sermon, "The Power of Enough," was published in her book, *God in Her Midst: Preaching Healing to Wounded Women*. She has preached versions of this

[12] Walker, xi.

sermon at her home church, Greater Allen AME Cathedral, in Jamaica, New York, and at numerous women's conferences within the last ten years. When she delivered this sermon, which is approximately forty minutes, at Greater Allen AME Cathedral during one of the three Sunday morning services, she preached to an audience of about two thousand people who were majority African American men and women.

"The Power of Enough" is a sermon that celebrates a woman's ability to begin to love and value herself in a manner that enables her to move from being a victim to a victor. Flake demonstrates the necessity of self-transformation and the integral role it plays in helping us to defy a forced naiveté—a coercion into thinking that one deserves abuse, unfaithfulness, and even a loveless marriage. This sermon challenges us to learn how to love ourselves, to be honest with ourselves, to recognize when we have had enough, and to be proactive about our situation. Flake moves her audience to a state of maturity in realizing "Enough is enough!" so that they can defeat their oppressive forces.[13]

The title of the sermon comes from the movie, *Enough*, starring Jennifer Lopez. When asked, why she paired this film with the sermon, she said:

> Because the woman was in an abusive situation and she needed to be freed for herself, she needed to be freed for her child. I just happened to have been watching that movie and I was so taken by that movie even much more that I was "What's Love Got to Do With It?" because to see that woman run, run, run, and every time that man found her. . . . And then I saw *Delores Claiborne* where she said, "An accident can be a wife's best friend." Just the fact that she ran and said, "Shoot, I'm not running anymore." That girl went and trained. And so, for me, that was like a woman taking charge of her life. . . .

[13] Elaine Flake, 47.

> She just had enough of trying to please this man and you know, coming to an understanding that it is what it is—I can't make him love me, but I can make me love me.[14]

Flake explained that she talks to so many women who are so bitter over divorce that they can't move on. So when she pairs the movie with the sermon and does an altar call at the end, she claims:

> It's a very liberating experience because whether they've had enough of a teenager disrespecting them, or whether they've had enough of a grown son living with them and not carrying his load, or a daughter-in-law. You know, whatever enough is—a boss, or being abused on your job—but we all have to get to the point where we've had enough. And when you reach that point, which is what I say in my sermon, when you get to the point that you say, enough, that means that you have been empowered beyond measure. That empowers you. And it's not until you reach that point, then that's when your life begins to change.[15]

Her audience responds extremely well to this sermon every time she preaches it, which is why she continues to preach it at women's conferences and retreats all across the nation.

*Analysis*

After providing the focal text, Genesis 29:35, "She conceived again and bore a son, and said, 'This time I will praise the Lord,'" Flake opens the sermon with her scene-by-scene replay of the movie. Lopez plays a character named Slim who falls victim to the domestic abuse of her husband. Flake strategically paints the picture of how Slim's storybook courtship, wedding, and honeymoon turned into a nightmare. She explains the cycle of abuse that consisted of beatings, cheating, repentance, and declarations of love. The more Slim's husband abuses her, the more he convinces her that she deserves his beatings and unfaithfulness.

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[14] Elaine Flake, personal Interview by Kimberly P. Johnson, November 4, 2009, Memphis, Tn.

[15] Ibid.

Flake challenges the notion that domestic abuse is limited to physical abuse. In talking about Slim, she says, "Not only is this woman abused physically, but she is also abused verbally. Emotionally and mentally manipulated, she is constantly told: 'It's your fault. You deserve it. You make me have to hit you.'"[16] This simple act of naming the various aspects of abuse is a strategy that not only helps her listeners identify with the character, but also gives them insight so that they too may recognize if they are also victims of domestic violence.

As Flake begins to deconstruct this idea that married women deserve to be abused, she strategically uses language that will draw out value judgments from her listeners. When she builds the imagery of a fairytale wedding and marriage gone wrong, she intentionally groups words together that will create a positive and negative association with survival and developmental motives. Flake utilizes what Michael Osborn calls light-dark metaphors.[17] Flake uses the light-dark combinations of 1) storybook (fairytale) with nightmare; and 2) marriage with prisoner to express the stark difference between where Slim's relationship with her husband started and where it ended. The relationship began as a storybook. It was a fairytale and the marriage started off being everything that Slim had hoped for, but then the marriage became a nightmare and the union that freely brought the two together had now become a union that had enslaved her causing her to be a prisoner in her own marriage. Both light-dark combinations symbolically represent Slim's past as light and her present as dark because

[16] Flake, 41.

[17] Michael Osborn, "Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family" in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism, Third Edition*, ed. Carl R. Burgchardt (State College, PA: Strata Publishing, Inc, 2005), 307.

the goal is to demonstrate that Slim needs to transform her future into a new form of light. Light-dark combinations are useful according to Michael Osborn "when speakers find it expedient to express an attitude of *inevitability* or *determinism* about the state of present affairs or the shape of the future. Change not simply *should have* occurred or *should* occur, but *had to* or *will* occur."[18] Hence, Slim's moment of radical subjectivity, or as Flake says, "change of attitude," happens when she decides that she has had enough abuse. It is in that moment that she begins to understand how to move from her dark and dreary present into a much brighter future. Flake's dichotomy between storybook (fairytale) and nightmare; and the dichotomy between marriage and prisoner build up to the overarching metaphor of Slim's struggle for survival in moving from victim to victor.

In addition to the light-dark metaphors, Flake uses war metaphors and verbs that coincide with the movie to help demonize the enemy—the husband—by visualizing the unthinkable. She discusses how Slim stages her "attack on him," how she "removes all of the guns in his arsenal," that it is either "crush or be crushed," and she describes the husband as a tormentor.[19] Then, Flake proceeds to mention that the time has come "for him to kill her" and that he is going to "bludgeon her to death."[20] All of these descriptions create an image that is in stark contrast to the victimized wife because the husband is unmistakably viewed as the abuser—the oppressive force that Slim must overcome.

[18] Ibid., 308.

[19] Flake, 41.

[20] Ibid.

At the end of the movie, Slim develops a plan to fight back in self defense but her husband dies, by accident. So, Flake clarifies for her listeners:

> I'm not celebrating the death of the abuser; however, I do celebrate this woman's realization that she has to take charge of her messy and miserable life and find a better way to live. I celebrate the fact that when she decides that she has lived with violence, weakness, and unhappiness long enough, she reaches down into her untapped inner resources and finds a power that has been hidden from her by her circumstances.[21]

Although womanist preaching does not support male-bashing, celebrate violence, or liberate one group at the expense of another, the ending scene of the movie narrative appears to do so. I get the point that Flake is making about Slim taking charge of her life, but the movie narrative appears to overshadow Flake's self-empowerment message with an anti-womanist message that liberates one person at the expense of another, which is why Flake qualifies what she is celebrating. Unfortunately, with this movie selection, there is no way to get around unintentionally communicating that it is okay to liberate one at the expense of another. However, I know that she fundamentally believes and even argues in her book that the "devaluation of African American men or any human being in order to affirm and heal African American women is antithetical to womanist preaching."[22] Therefore, this part of her sermon reflects a point of difficulty that Flake encounters when preaching womanist sermons.

Moving beyond the point of difficulty, Flake seems to spiritualize the movie when she talks about Slim's transformation, in order to: 1) emphasize the power of God at work when one says she has had enough, which also demonstrates the power of God at work during moments of radical subjectivity; 2) create a sense of identification between her

[21] Flake, 43.

[22] Ibid., 18.

audience and Slim; and 3) so that she can bring forth a prophetic message that relates to Slim and all who identify with Slim. Here, Flake explains how Slim transforms from victim to victor—Slim's moment of radical subjectivity. It is in Slim's moment of desperation that "Everything that has happened *to* her finally causes something to happen *within* her." Flake orally emphasizes the words, "*to*" and "*within*" to highlight the cause-effect relationship between the abuse that Slim experienced and her ability to finally reach deep within herself to decide that she has had enough and that she can do better. As Flake goes on to explain Slim's inward change she says, "Something inside Slim makes her realize that if she does not overcome some inner weaknesses, she will never move out of her place of oppression. She is clear that her husband is not going to give up or change, so the only way she is going to be free requires her to change."[23] The radicality of being able to say, "Enough is enough," I'm not going to take this anymore and I'm not going to let him oppress me anymore because I deserve better is what makes this sermon an example of radical subjectivity—it represents the journey of a woman who gives herself permission to love and value self. This is radical because entirely too many African American women suffer from low self-esteem due to a lack of self-affirmation and self-love.

In the book, *Feminism is for Everybody*, bell hooks explains this point by discussing the devastating effects of sexism and how women had to unlearn self-hatred. She says:

> We all knew firsthand that we had been socialized as females by patriarchal thinking to see ourselves as inferior to men, to see ourselves as always and only in competition with one another for patriarchal approval, to look upon each other with jealousy, fear, and hatred. Sexist thinking made us judge each other without

[23] Ibid., 42.

> compassion and punish one another harshly. Feminist thinking helped us unlearn female self-hatred.[24]

When one has been socialized into practicing self-hatred, the idea of learning how to value one's self can be quite challenging. Likewise, when a woman is in an abusive relationship, the abuser conditions the woman to fear and she oftentimes begins to develop a warped image of herself.

If we look closer at Slim's transformation, we see more instances in which Flake spiritualizes the movie, *Enough*. I believe the "untapped inner resources" refers to the power of The Holy Spirit at work inside of Slim. Every time Flake makes reference to The Holy Spirit, she uses terminology such as "something inside Slim" or "untapped inner resources." By alluding to the presence of The Holy Spirit at work in Slim, Flake is able to then deliver the prophetic message that God has for those who find themselves in similar situations. She states:

> The word of the Lord to every woman who has spent too much time settling for relationships, jobs, and situations that are not fulfilling, nurturing, or true to your potential is that there is power in deciding you have had enough. . . . God is calling for brave and determined women to adopt an attitude of intolerance for those things in their lives that abuse, confuse, and restrict. Our divine Provider is just waiting for some of us to say, "I am not going to go on like this. I am ready to walk in my privilege and break through to a new way of being." God is just waiting to work in us and with us to replace fear with self-confidence, guilt and shame with the determination to be better, and low expectation for self to a conviction that says, "I am better than this, so I can do better than this."[25]

Once again, Flake employs light-dark metaphors; but here, she switches the order of the metaphor to dark-light in order to place emphasis on the future that is in store for her listeners. She says, "God will replace fear with *self-confidence*, guilt and shame with the

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[24] bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge, South End Press, 2000), 14.

[25] Flake, 43-44.

*determination to be better*, and low expectation for self to *a conviction that says, "I am better than this, so I can do better than this*."[26] Overall, the movie functions on two levels: 1) as a narrative to illustrate the power of enough; and 2) as a rhetorical artifact that the preacher is able to preach from in place of a biblical text. Flake's entire introduction operates as a sermon within the sermon. She uses the movie as one of her sermonic texts; she establishes the plot to illustrate the situation, complication, and resolution of the character; and then delivers a prophetic message for Slim and all the Slims in the congregation. Slim, the character becomes a metaphor for the women (or Slims) in the congregation.

After Flake finishes dissecting the movie, to make her first main point, that "there is power in deciding you have had enough," she immediately transitions to the story of Leah in Genesis 29 to reveal the point at which Leah decides that she has had enough.[27] Similar to how she outlined the plot of the movie, she outlines the plot of this biblical story. She conveys that Leah was Jacob's first wife and that he never loved her because he loved her younger sister, Rachel. Flake explicitly names rejection as one of the sources of Leah's pain. As a result of this rejection, Leah became a woman of convenience, whom Jacob chose to sleep with, but not love. Flake develops Leah's character as a victim of a love-impoverished marriage. Flake says, "[W]hen God saw that Leah was not loved, God opened her womb. Perhaps the blessing of reproduction was designed to make her see that sometimes you have to create new life for yourself

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 43.

apart from the one that cannot give you what you need."[28] This idea about the blessing of reproduction helps Flake to establish the point at which Leah decides that she has had enough. Flake describes Leah's mental and emotional condition during the first three pregnancies. She says:

> When Leah gave birth to her first son, her thoughts were only of Jacob and her misery. She named him Reuben, which means "surely my husband will love me now." Her son's name is an indication of her desperation. She had another son, but his birth gave Leah no joy or self-appreciation. All she could see in the midst of divine creation was "because the Lord saw that I am hated, God gave me Simeon." She had a third son, but still she was controlled by fear, poor judgment, and emotional dysfunction, and she was never able to celebrate the creative process that was God's gift to her to motivate her to emotionally connect to herself. Instead, her response to God's blessing upon the birth of Levi was "Now my husband will become attached to me because I have given him three sons."[29]

Flake parallels Leah's condition to Slim's condition without explicitly saying that she is doing this. Here, Leah, quite like Slim, feels hated, desperate, and she finds herself a prisoner of fear, poor judgment, and emotional dysfunction. Just as Slim's change of attitude, or moment of radical subjectivity, came "in the midst of her depression and despair," Leah's change of attitude/defining moment came in the midst of her emotional dysfunction, fear, poor judgment, self denial, and people (Jacob) pleasing behavior.[30] Furthermore, Flake uses similar language when describing Leah's change of attitude. For Leah, Flake claims, "One day a defining moment gave birth to a change of attitude. This change of attitude changed her focus and reshaped her inner reality. . . . She had enough of trying to deny who she was and trying to be who Jacob wanted her to be."[31] For Slim,

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[28] Ibid., 44.

[29] Ibid., 44-45.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 45.

she says, “One day, in the midst of her depression and despair, Slim has a change of attitude. Everything that has happened to her finally causes something to happen within her. . . . But one day she experiences the inner power that comes with saying, ‘Enough.’”[32] Flake creates enthymematic identification between the biblical character Leah and the movie character Slim. She uses the same premise in Slim’s struggle of survival to describe Leah’s struggle, thus creating identification between the two characters. Both Slim and Leah eventually arrive at the point where they are able to see their situations for what they are and decide to do something about it. The only difference is that Slim’s struggle is a physical battle and Leah’s struggle is a spiritual battle. Slim has to physically fight to save her life, whereas Leah has to internally fight in a spiritual war against the “spirit of fear and defeat” to save herself from emotional dysfunction.[33]

Flake argues, when Leah gave birth to her fourth son, “Leah gave birth to a new Leah.”[34] Leah’s transformation into a “new Leah” lends itself to radical subjectivity because she finally gave herself permission to love self and to find her value in God. Flake argues, this time, Leah realized that she could not make Jacob love her, but “she could make Leah love Leah. The new Leah vowed with the birth of Judah, ‘This time I will praise the Lord.’”[35] Flake uses Leah’s change of attitude as a way to bring the identification full circle. She has already identified Slim with her listeners, then Leah with Slim, and now, as she makes her second main point, “So many women have some

[32] Ibid., 42.

[33] Ibid., 47.

[34] Ibid., 45.

[35] Ibid.

"Jacobs" in their lives that they need to put in proper perspective." Here, Jacob becomes a metaphor to identify Leah with her listeners. According to Flake, Jacob represents whatever is capable of preventing a woman from appreciating who she is and discovering her purpose. She says, "For every Leah who is ready to be free of bad habits, negative attitudes, and ungodly behaviors that keep her in bondage, things can change when she draws the line and begins to walk in godly strength. . . . Become a real fighter and force with which to contend in this spiritual war for your life."[36] By using the words, *fighter* and *spiritual war*, Flake continues to draw parallels between Leah and Slim, for her listeners to figure out. By the time that she arrives to her final main point, "Sometimes we cannot wait for deliverance; we have to fight for it," the listeners have already figured out that Leah's plan of action was to engage in a spiritual fight that would free her to love herself, and Slim's plan of action was to engage in a physical fight that would free her from abuse.

In this sermon, Flake has used the movie character, Slim, and the biblical character, Leah to encourage us to "break away from the stuff that ushers us into dangerous territory," to stop waiting for deliverance, and to fight for it ourselves.[37] The sermon educates people to "adopt an attitude of intolerance for those things in our lives that abuse, confuse, and restrict."[38] Flake affirms self, authenticates self, and legitimizes self by conveying to her individual listeners that "there is power in deciding you have had enough," by helping them to understand that "when [they] are really walking with the

[36] Ibid., 46.

[37] Ibid., 47.

[38] Ibid., 43.

Lord, [they] will eventually get to the place that [they] know that [their] survival and growth depend on [their] ability to say, 'No more!'", and by re-envisioning the characters from victim to victor.[39] In other words, she moves her audience to operate out of their own agency, or their own individual radical subjectivities, so they can fight for their own deliverance.

*The Womanist Characteristics*

According to Flake, womanist preaching preaches healing to African American women. She claims that womanist preaching is:

> responsible for sending messages that transform a culture of violence into a culture of healing. . . . [It] must challenge the notion that violence against women is in any way justified. . . . [It names] the sins of . . . male perpetrators and dismantle[s] all antifemale attitudes, even those perpetuated in scripture. . . . [F]or victims of violence [it] must alleviate guilt, blame, and shame; minister healing to their wounded hearts, minds, and spirits; and empower them to lead fulfilled and productive lives.[40]

Flake has interpretive methods and preaching methodologies that help her to live up to her understanding of womanist preaching. Ministers who want to preach healing to wounded women must affirm, show sensitivity, honor tradition, liberate, present Jesus as an Advocate for women, acknowledge African Ancestry, avoid male-bashing, tell the truth, inspire action, and think outside of the box.[41]

Throughout Flake's sermon, she either demonstrates or names some of these characteristics. Without a doubt, the affirmation to value self and inspiration to act on behalf of self is seen in both the movie narrative and the biblical narrative because both characters come to a realization that they deserve better and then they fight for what they

[39] Ibid., 47.

[40] Ibid., 4.

[41] Ibid., 13-20.

believe they deserve. Flake models sensitivity by the way she discusses the suffering and the circumstances surrounding the suffering of Slim and Leah; and the way she broadens the definition of domestic abuse to include "settling for relationships, jobs, and situations that are not fulfilling, nurturing, or true to [one's] potential."[42] Her commitment to not ignore or justify the abuse of both characters reflects her obligation to tell the truth. Flake's words of liberation to an authentic human existence are mirrored in her discussions surrounding Slim's change of attitude that helps her develop courage and self-esteem along with Leah's change of attitude that allows her to find the Lord and finally love herself. Flake's movie narrative comes close to male-bashing because it demonizes the abuser by illustrating that the male antagonist dies at the end of the movie. More than this, Slim kills him—accidentally, but she kills him nevertheless, as a result of her newfound strength. However, this is why she does qualify that what she is celebrating is Slim's ability to take charge of her life, which then attempts to take the celebratory focus off the demise of the abusive husband. Finally, in terms of thinking outside of the box, if we take time to look at the main character of the movie narrative, we will see that Flake opened her sermon already thinking outside of the box by telling a story about a Latina, instead of an African American, a point which I will address later.

The overall quality that makes Flake's sermon a womanist sermon expressing radical subjectivity is the fact that it affirms women and it empowers them to change themselves and to change their oppressive situations. Flake's sermon reflects the process of learning to accept the truth about one's self and one's circumstances along with the journey to self-love, self-confidence, self-worth, and a healthy self-esteem, and the actualization of the ultimate agency—defeating one's oppressor, which is what

[42] Ibid., 43.

categorizes her message under this first tenet of radical subjectivity. The process that the characters go through to get to the point of loving and valuing themselves demonstrates that they have achieved an elevated sense of consciousness that finally allows them to resist their oppression. Radical subjectivity helps women to overcome male domination by empowering them to change their perception so they can change their situation. Let us examine how another womanist preacher approaches the same text.

**Rhetorical Analysis of Gina Stewart's Sermon, "Enough is Enough!"**

> *She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the Lord." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having Children.*
>
> **Genesis 29:35, NIV**

Gina Stewart's sermon, "Enough is Enough," was first delivered in 2006 for a women's revival, at Berean Baptist Church, in Memphis, Tennessee.[43] She preached this forty minute sermon to a predominantly African American audience of approximately one thousand women. Stewart continues to preach this sermon and different versions of it all across the country to women and men. "Enough is Enough!" celebrates the defining moment when a woman decides that she does "not have to participate in [her] own oppression," that she is "better than [her] situation, and [she] can do better."[44] The sermon is about a woman who suffers from a "wounded self-esteem" because she lives her life and sees herself through the eyes of her unloving husband. Eventually, she decides to stop participating in her own oppression and start valuing herself. She has a defining moment which changes her attitude and allows her to realize that her value is not

[43] Gina Stewart, "Enough is Enough" in *Those Preaching Women: A Multicultural Collection*, eds. Ella Pearson Mitchell and Valerie Bridgeman Davis (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2008), 13.

[44] Ibid., 13.

determined by what another person thinks; her value comes from God. Stewart, like Flake, uses a movie character and a biblical character to demonstrate how the defining moment of realizing, "enough is enough," and walking away from "love-deficient relationships" can free us from emotional dependence and a "wounded self-esteem."[45] This sermon challenges us to learn how to love ourselves, how to value ourselves aside from what other people think, to realize when "Enough really is Enough," and to develop our love relationship with God.[46] Stewart moves her audience to a state of maturity in realizing "Enough is Enough!" which also serves to liberate and heal them from their emotional dependence, "wounded self-esteem," impaired vision and holes in their souls.[47]

*Analysis*

The sermon opens with a scene from the movie, *What's Love Got to Do with It?* where Tina Turner runs across the parking lot to a motel, after being beaten by her husband, Ike Turner. She tells the clerk that she only has 36 cents and a Mobil card, but if he gives her a room, she will pay him back. Stewart refers to Tina Turner's ability to walk away from "a life of physical, emotional, and mental abuse," as Turner's defining moment; which I refer to as her moment of radical subjectivity because in that moment she finally affirmed herself in a way that allowed her to escape her abuse.[48] She says,

[45] Ibid., 11.

[46] Ibid., 13.

[47] Ibid., 11.

[48] Ibid., 9.

"When Tina decided she had had enough and decided to say no to an unproductive, unhealthy relationship, she opened the door to a new and exciting chapter in her life."[49]

Stewart uses Turner's defining moment as her transition into the biblical text so that she can show Leah's unproductive, unhealthy relationship(s), and then identify Leah's defining moment. The movie analogy serves as a contemporary example of what is going on in scripture. As she moves into the text, she confesses that "Tina's story" reminds her of the character in the Genesis text. Stewart immediately defines the meaning of Leah's name as "wearied" or "afflicted one," so that she can paint the picture of Leah's suffering and distress in order to make her first main point, "Leah invested a lot of time and mental and emotional energy trying to gain Jacob's affection."[50] Here, she addresses the tragedy of Leah's relationship with Jacob including his lack of love and attraction for her, along with the fact that her father had to trick him into marrying her. Stewart strategically uses the meaning of Leah's name; the names of her first, second, and third-born sons; and then the name of her fourth-born son to help develop all three main points.

Next, Stewart names and describes the unapologetic patriarchal social structure that Leah is subjected to, which attaches a woman's worth to her ability to reproduce. She claims that a woman's redemption was in producing children to preserve the male family name. According to Stewart, "Leah had something that Rachel didn't have. Leah could produce."[51] But the irony of the situation is that it did not matter how many sons

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 9-10.

[51] Ibid., 10.

Leah had, Jacob's feelings for Leah never changed. Stewart explains how Leah's expectation of Jacob increased with the birth of each son.

> When Leah gave birth to her first son, she named him Reuben, meaning the "Lord has seen" my misery. She thought, *Surely Jacob will love me now*. She had another son and named him Simeon, which means "because the Lord heard" that I am unloved. She had a third son and named him Levi and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons."[52]

Unfortunately for Leah, her expectations were never met, "Jacob never heard, never saw, and never connected."[53] Leah allowed her dependence to rob her of her self-worth. I believe Stewart's portrayal of Leah being robbed of her self-worth reflects an individual who fell into the trap of naiveté. Although Leah's self-worth has to do with her own value of herself, she allowed her cultural tradition to dictate who could assign her value; and unfortunately for her, Jacob never followed through.

Stewart uses the cultural practices of the patriarchal society along with the names of Leah's first three sons to support her second main point, "Leah suffered a wounded self-esteem. She relied too much on Jacob's estimation and evaluation."[54] Once she makes this point, Jacob and Laban becomes metaphors that allow her to relate Leah's condition to the condition of her listeners in an effort to help them identify with Leah. She states:

> Like Leah, so many of us suffer from wounded self esteem because of someone's else's evaluation of us. Although self-esteem refers to our estimation of our own worth, many of us inherited our initial perception of ourselves from other sources: from Jacobs and Labans in our lives. We never consulted God about our worth. So we suffer from impaired vision, holes in our soul, insecurity, and mistaken identities.[55]

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[52] Ibid., 11.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

The fact that Stewart makes the point about Leah suffering from "wounded self-esteem" due to Leah's dependence on Jacob and then ties it to the women in the congregation is a strong indication that this is one of her main points. In Stewart's explanation, she sheds light on all the women in her audience who naively inherited their perception of themselves based on what another person thought. She does this to expose the naiveté of her audience members.

After establishing Leah's situation and complication, the next movement of the sermon deals with Stewart's third main point, the defining moment or moment of radical subjectivity that helps Leah resolve her problems, or at least change her attitude about her problems. "One day, Leah decided that enough is enough."[56] This defining moment changed Leah's focus and gave her a new perspective of herself—"she realized that she could no longer live her life dependent upon the ongoing nurture and approval of Jacob. . . . She finally realized that she couldn't make Jacob love Leah, but she could love Leah, and most of all, God loved Leah."[57] The "radicality" of this defining moment is in Leah's decision to finally love herself, to affirm herself, and to stop looking for the approval or affirmation of others to give her self-worth. Stewart identifies the birth of Leah's fourth son, Judah, as Leah's defining moment because this birthing process allowed Leah to give birth to a new Leah. When Leah gave birth to Judah, she said, "This time I will praise the Lord."[58] Leah's moment of radical subjectivity enables her: 1) to finally resist self-hatred; 2) to resist having her worth determined by people in her

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., 11-12.

[58] Ibid., 12.

life; 3) to love herself; and 4) to turn to God, to find her value in the One who gives her worth.

Stewart uses her homiletical imagination, as she assumes the role of Leah, to further expound on what she thinks Leah said during the defining moment that changed her life. Speaking in first-person, Stewart references the cries of Leah's heart as Leah gives birth to her first three sons—"I had Reuben and he didn't see me. I had Simeon, and he didn't hear me. I had Levi, and he wouldn't become attached to me."[59] She reestablishes the problem in order to restate her main points, but this time, from the first-person standpoint. She says, "I cannot experience my potential as long as I keep investing my emotional and mental energy in love-deficient relationships;" which corresponds to her original point, "Leah invested a lot of time and mental and emotional energy trying to gain Jacob's affection."[60] Next, she states, "I can't give myself away trying to measure up to somebody else's idea of what acceptable is;" which alludes to the point that Leah had low self-esteem because she "relied too much on Jacob's estimation and evaluation."[61] Then, she makes the claim, "Jacob may not change, but I can change;" which evokes her third point, "Leah decided enough is enough."[62]

Stewart uses repetition again, but this time to restate her points from the perspective of first-person plural. She acknowledges first, that "many of us have Jacobs in our lives;" second, that "we believe [Jacob] is essential for our sense of security and

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., 12, 10.

[61] Ibid., 12, 11.

[62] Ibid.

self-worth;" and third, that "we have to do what Leah did—and say enough is enough."[63] The purpose of reiterating her points and moving from first-person, as Leah, to first-person plural and then to the universal "I" of first-person is to put the congregation of women into her sermon so that they become the individual who finally realizes, "I do not have to settle for less. I do not have to participate in my own oppression. . . . I am better than this situation, and I can do better. . . . The God I serve will get me to the point where I can say enough is enough." And then, decide "Enough really is enough."[64]

In this sermon, Stewart used Tina Turner, from the movie, *What's Love Got to Do with It?,* and the biblical character Leah to encourage us to consult God about our worth and to stop being emotionally dependent on other people to construct our sense of security, self-worth, and self-esteem. The sermon teaches women to stop settling for less and to stop playing a role in their own oppression. We see the characteristics of radical subjectivity through the manner in which Stewart affirms self, nurtures self to a particular level of maturity, and in her embodiment of Leah. As Stewart re-envisions the characters in her sermon from that of victim to victor, she also moves her audience to operate out of their own radical subjectivities by deciding "Enough really is Enough!" in order to free themselves from their own "emotional and psychological prison."[65]

*The Womanist Characteristics*

According to Stewart, womanist preaching liberates women, is sensitive to women's experience, challenges traditional interpretations, constructs alternative

[63] Ibid., 12.

[64] Ibid., 13.

[65] Ibid. 9.

realities, and validates women's experiences and perspectives.[66] She believes that while this form of preaching serves to liberate women, it must also be sensitive to people's experiences. When expounding on this idea, she mentions the woman at the well in The Gospel of John chapter four, and says, "Jesus never talks to her about her husbands, Jesus talks to her about thirst."[67] In other words, Jesus does not demonize this woman; instead, he liberates her. Stewart argues that "womanist preaching challenges us in new ways of interpreting scripture. Often, when we preach [Genesis 21], Hagar is the villain instead of the victim.[68] Womanist preaching helps us construct alternative realities."[69] This type of homiletical approach allows the preacher to re-image the text in a manner that illustrates Hagar the victim as opposed to Hagar the villain, which serves to then validate the experiences and perspectives of women. Stewart claims the top womanist themes that arise out of her preaching are: "valuing of self and self-worth; self-esteem; giving

[66] Gina Stewart, personal interview by Kimberly P. Johnson, October 20, 2009, Christ Missionary Baptist Church, Memphis, TN.

[67] Ibid.

[68] A few chapters prior, in Genesis 16, the Lord promised Abram, who later became Abraham, that he would have many offspring. The problem was that his wife, Sarai, who later became Sarah was barren. Sarai decided that her maidservant, Hagar, should sleep with Abram so they could build their family. Hagar gave birth to a child named Ishmael. By the time we get to Genesis 21, Sarah is finally pregnant by Abraham and gives birth to a son, Isaac. Sarah becomes disturbed with Ishmael and decides that she does not want him sharing in the inheritance of her son, so she orders Hagar and Ishmael to be sent away. In the unfortunate occasion when ministers preach that Hagar is a villain, it is usually because they are addressing the fact that Hagar slept with another woman's husband. They miss the fact that Hagar was in servitude to Sarai, which means that Hagar had no say in the matter. Renita Weems argues, in her book, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 18, that "Failure by the subordinate to fulfill her or his responsibility virtually guaranteed punishment, retribution, or discipline…." Therefore, Hagar really was a victim.

[69] Gina Stewart, personal interview by Kimberly P. Johnson, October 20, 2009, Christ Missionary Baptist Church, Memphis, TN.

yourself permission to love yourself; giving yourself permission to walk away from destructive, non-productive toxic relationships; liberation; and gender justice."[70]

After examining Stewart's sermon, we clearly see a number of these qualities reflected in her message. From the character in the movie selection to the character in the biblical narrative to the women in the congregation, the sermon is a message of liberation that seeks to liberate all women who suffer in the areas of low self-esteem. She does not demonize Leah for thinking so poorly of herself. Instead, she contextualizes Leah's circumstance and then creates identification with the women in the pews to show that Leah is not alone because many of us do this too. This is her way of demonstrating sensitivity to a situation that she points out as negative, by making the claim that so many of us suffer from the same situation, which is what also helps her at the end to empower the women in the pews to change their situations. A sermon not focused on sensitivity would not even acknowledge that others share the same wounded self-esteem experience as Leah, which would rhetorically condemn Leah as a sinner and cause the listeners to place judgment against Leah. This sermon undoubtedly validates the experiences and perspectives of women because it is a sermon about a woman's experience and the preacher looks at the text from Leah's perspective. Stewart even takes it a step further when she begins to speak in first person because then she rhetorically takes on the role of Leah and begins to speak as Leah.

The overarching quality that makes Stewart's womanist sermon a sermon that can be classified as an example of radical subjectivity is the fact that it empowers women to validate themselves and to finally give themselves permission to love themselves. This

[70] Ibid.

sermon ultimately communicates that self-worth is not tied to what another person thinks. Stewart strategically demonstrates the various phases of Leah's identity development and then celebrates Leah's realization that her value and self-worth come from God. She also celebrates Leah's decision to finally start loving herself. Stewart's contextualization of Leah's state of oppression reveals how Leah inherited a low self-esteem. She implies that Leah's father did not think Leah was marriage material, hence the trickery of marrying Leah off to Jacob. She discusses the patriarchal social structure that attaches value to one's ability to reproduce and even though Leah could produce, Jacob never loved her—he never gave her value. Then, she provides the illustration of the birth of Leah's sons, which voices Leah's agony of her love-impoverished relationship. But, when she arrives at the birth of Leah's fourth son, Stewart emphasizes Leah's attitude change, the point of Leah's process where Leah realizes that she can change—she experiences her own transformation and stops participating in her oppression. The fact that this sermon addresses the journey toward self-esteem, self-love, and self-worth is what makes this sermon an example of radical subjectivity.

## Conclusion: A Comparison and Contrast of Rhetorical Strategies

The most obvious rhetorical similarity, besides the use of the same scripture/biblical narrative or the title resemblance, is that both sermons begin with a movie narrative. Flake's movie choice, *Enough*, clues the congregation into how she came up with the title of her sermon; whereas, Stewart's movie title does not present the same connection with her sermon title. What is different about Flake's inclusion of the movie, *Enough*, is that the main character of the movie is a Latina, not an African American woman. Is Flake thinking outside of the box by including this movie narrative

even though the starring role is not played by an African American woman? Is she pushing the envelope on the womanist debate surrounding essentialism vs. particularity? Essentialism argues that a womanist can only be an African American female; while particularity argues that it is not essential for a womanist to be an African American female, it is the particular experiences of an individual that allows the individual to relate to the oppressive experiences of black women, which qualifies that person to be a womanist. On the one hand, Flake's construction of womanism and womanist theology, in her book, confines womanism to African American women, which leads to essentialism. Yet, on the other hand, when she discusses the practical methodologies that preach healing to wounded women, she opens the discussion to men and women, which creates room for the particularity argument. In an interview, Flake brought clarity to this very issue. She said, "Womanist preaching can come from males and females. I don't necessarily think that a black man can be a womanist, but I do feel that Jim [James] Cone and some of the others would see themselves as one sympathetic to womanism and maybe even more."[71]

Another similarity between the preachers is that they challenge people's understanding of domestic violence by broadening the scope of abuses that fall under the category of domestic violence. The term domestic violence is most often used to refer to the physical abuse or assaults that women experience by their spouse or significant other. However, Flake and Stewart help their audience members recognize that emotional, psychological, and verbal abuse also fall under the umbrella of domestic violence. The reason they bring their audience to this level of understanding is that they are both

[71] Elaine Flake, personal Interview by Kimberly P. Johnson, November 4, 2009, Memphis, Tn.

specifically targeting women who have been emotionally, physically, psychologically, and verbally abused in order to empower them to change their situation and finally decide for themselves that "enough is enough." Furthermore, in addition to naming domestic violence as one of the evils that plague African American women, Flake explicitly names rejection and Stewart names patriarchy as additional sources of pain. Naming domestic violence, rejection, and patriarchy is necessary because womanism seeks to confront all oppressive forces of power, and the only way to confront a problem is to name the problem.

Flake and Stewart use metaphor and identification to help their audience recognize themselves in the sermon so that they too can begin to name the sources of their pain. Both movie narratives describe their character as a prisoner. Jennifer Lopez's character, Slim, becomes a "prisoner in her marriage and her home" who is "living in the emotional prison of low self-esteem" and she is not able to break out of this prison until she decides she has had enough.[72] Similarly, Stewart's recap of the scene from *What's Love Got to Do with It?* portrays Tina Turner as an escaped prisoner who just walked away from an emotional and psychological prison. Both characters took up residence in the prison of low self-esteem, so for the audience to see them come to a point where they give themselves permission to love and value themselves, this permission gets transferred onto the audience through identification. Additionally, the Jacob metaphor for Flake and the Jacob and Laban metaphors for Stewart help the audience to identify the various sources of their oppression. According to Flake, Jacob represents a person, experience,

[72] Flake, 41.

or memory; and according to Stewart, "Jacob does not have to be a man. He could be a woman or some primary person in our lives."[73] Likewise, the same holds true for Laban.

The more Flake and Stewart identify the source of Leah's pain, the more they try to relate it to the pain of their audience members through identification. Oftentimes, when the preachers make a point, they tie that point to their audience. For example, Flake does this by interjecting, "The word of the Lord to every woman who has spent too much time settling for relationships . . . So many women have some 'Jacobs' in their lives that they need to put in proper perspective . . . Being women of God requires that we recognize our own oppression and our own destructive and ungodly behavior."[74] Stewart connects with her audience by saying, "Like Leah, so many of us suffer from wounded self-esteem . . . Like Leah, many of us have Jacobs in our lives. . . . But, at some point, we have to do what Leah did—and say enough is enough."[75] This form of identification empowers the audience to act just like Leah at the end of the sermon and declare for themselves that enough really is enough. The reason being, if the audience can see themselves as Leah, and logically understand how detrimental it was to Leah's survival for her to have a change of attitude or defining moment, then they too will realize how detrimental it is for them to also have a change of attitude or defining moment. Plus, Leah's scenario gives them a glimpse of how their own future will pan out to a brighter future as long as they are courageous enough to have their own defining moment by realizing that "enough is enough" and acting on their situation.

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[73] Gina Stewart, personal interview by Kimberly P. Johnson, October 20, 2009, Christ Missionary Baptist Church, Memphis, TN.

[74] Flake, 43-47.

[75] Stewart, 11-12.

Another major similarity is that both sermons talk about Leah's defining moment that transformed her life. The preachers not only refer to this as a defining moment, they also use the words change of attitude and personal transformation to describe this life changing moment. They both construct their sermons as a physical war for Slim/Tina Turner and a spiritual war for Leah. Slim and Turner are fighting for freedom, whereas Leah, is fighting for deliverance according to Flake or for self-worth in learning how to value self, according to Stewart. In both cases, Leah fights to get out of her situation. Stewart claims that Leah's change of attitude in deciding she could no longer be dependent upon Jacob "changed her focus and reshaped her perspective and inner reality."[76] Likewise, Flake argues that Leah's "change of attitude changed her focus and reshaped her inner reality. . . . She had enough of trying to deny who she was and trying to be who Jacob wanted her to be."[77] All in all, they use some of the same language throughout their sermon to make similar points.

The second major difference between these two sermons is that Stewart employs repetition significantly more than Flake. Stewart's homiletical imagination allows her to take on the role of Leah to reiterate her points in first-person. Then, as she switches back-and-forth between first-person plural and first-person singular (but from the perspective of the universal "I") she restates her argument from the standpoint of Leah, from the standpoint of the audience, and from the standpoint of one included, among all people, in the proposed actions of the sermon—the universal "I". Flake's sermon does not use the universal "I." She primarily writes in second-person and then chooses to further emphasize her main points by providing more examples as opposed to repeating

[76] Ibid., 11.

[77] Flake, 45.

her statements. After examining both sermons, repetition (of main points) appears to be a stylistic choice and not necessarily a characteristic of womanist preaching.

Overall, these sermons illustrate how radical subjectivity is communicated through the preached message and what rhetorical strategies are used to convey radical subjectivity. In both cases, the preachers illustrated the radical subjectivity of Leah through their narration of Leah's process from victim to victor. Their narrative demonstrated the abuse that Leah experienced, which led to low self-esteem, and then described the defining moment that empowered Leah to change her situation and to start loving herself. Both sermons revealed a moment of epiphany that empowered Leah to act. This does not mean that all sermons attempting to reflect radical subjectivity must address domestic violence. Radical subjectivity reflects the heightened awareness that one develops that empowers her to escape from her oppressive situation. Furthermore, we have recognized that radical subjectivity sermons are very intentional about naming the source of pain for wounded women, using identification, and various metaphors, to help the audience members see themselves in the message or form their own value judgments about the character(s) in the sermon. Plus, radical subjectivity sermons are deliberate about using empowering/transformative language to not only detail the character's epiphany, but to authorize and encourage the audience to act on behalf of self as well.

In the next chapter, I examine the rhetorical strategies that a womanist preacher employs when she wants to restore collective memory and communal pride in order to bring about communal healing.

## CHAPTER THREE

## TRADITIONAL COMMUNALISM

> *[T]he affirmation of the loving connections and relational bonds formed by Black women—including familial, maternal, platonic, religious, sexual, and spiritual ties. Black women's ability to create, re-member, nurture, protect, sustain, and liberate communities which are marked and measured not by those outside of one's own community but by the acts of inclusivity, mutuality, reciprocity, and self-care practiced within it (opposite of the biological deterministic assumption that a woman's role is to serve as nurturer and protector)*[1]

This chapter examines the meaning of traditional communalism, the term Stacey Floyd-Thomas uses to describe the second tenet of womanism, and the application of it in a sermon. First, I will begin by explaining how Stacey Floyd-Thomas defines this term, how her colleagues define this term, followed by how Alice Walker originally defined this second tenet of womanism. Second, I will offer a close reading of a sermon that was delivered by a womanist scholar and preacher who illuminates the meaning of traditional communalism from a vantage point that seeks to liberate self, community, and those outside of the community. Cheryl Kirk-Duggan's sermon, "Women of the Cloth," uses the Luke 13:10-13 scripture to challenge our behavioral practices as well as our beliefs concerning our call to the work of ministry that keep us in bondage, it restores a self-awareness about our calling to minister the gospel message, and it moves the audience toward a communal healing. Following the sermon analysis, this chapter will juxtapose Kirk-Duggan's sermon with key rhetorical strategies from Flake's sermon and Stewart's sermon to uncover any rhetorical patterns that are consistent or different between traditional communalism and radical subjectivity.

[1] Floyd-Thomas, 78.

*Defining Traditional Communalism*

Traditional Communalism, the term that Floyd-Thomas uses to describe the second tenet of womanism, speaks to the ways in which cultural traditions have nurtured and supported black women on our individual and collective journey towards liberation.[2] I understand traditional communalism as the life-giving relationships that empower, protect, and nourish us in ways that help us to stay the course toward authenticity, freedom, justice, and equality. As said by Floyd-Thomas, traditional communalism also encompasses "the moral principles and practices of Black women living in solidarity with and in support of those with whom they share a common heritage and contextual language . . . [it is] 'in/visible dignity' and 'un/shouted courage' (adapted from Cannon) which furthers the survival and liberation of *all* Black women and their communities."[3] She describes it as a "synthesis of double consciousness" that comes from "striking a balance between diametric opposites and the ability to address and readdress, deconstruct and reconstruct while simultaneously subverting the forces that destroy Black communities and devastate the lives within them."[4] Traditional communalism is an inherited and shared legacy that is passed down through the generations and it has the ability to rescue women from the "strongholds of internalized oppression (i.e., colorism) and self-delusion (i.e., exceptionalism) and restore them with self-awareness, collective memory, and communal pride."[5]

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[2] Ibid., 9.

[3] Ibid., 78.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

According to Dianne M. Stewart, traditional communalism "calls Black women Home."[6] Her understanding of communalism is rooted in the "Caribbean traditions of solidarity, honor, and character."[7] She employs the "limbo dance," from her father's characterization of the Jamaican limbo, as a metaphor to describe the continuous process of negotiating space and boundaries on both the personal and communal levels.[8] She argues that, "The story of the African diaspora illuminates all too well how significations of blackness, especially within the shadow of Western Christian cultures, chronically deprive us of the capacity to be sensual and to use sensual power as a liberation practice."[9] The limbo becomes a "dance of resistance," a "boundary crossing," and an "encoding of an exilic people's" aspiration of going home.[10] For Stewart, the communal aspect of privileging her father's voice and experience with dancing limbo in Jamaica, and the preserving of ancestral (male and female) narratives and/or memories, is that they enhance our "cultural flexibility and dexterity," and "provide texture and detail" to "our historical memories and cultural knowledges" that seem to disappear with time.[11] She argues that the natural memories of our foreparents have the ability to free us from alienation and dehumanization. Thus, traditional communalism represents the life-giving ancestral narratives that tell us who we are and remind us from where we come.

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[6] Diana M. Stewart, "Dancing Limbo: Black Passages through the Boundaries of Place, Race, Class, and Religion," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 82.

[7] Ibid., 83.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 88.

[11] Ibid., 94-95.

Similarly, "Hospitality, Haints, and Healing: A Southern African American Meaning of Religion," by Rosemary Freeney Harding with Rachel Elizabeth Harding, examines narratives; but also explores rituals, healing practices, and the hospitable practices of the Harding family over a five-generation period. Freeney Harding claims that the "stories [her] mother tells resonate strongly with the ethics and spirituality of Alice Walker's Womanism."[12] For the Harding family, traditional communalism appears to be the coming together of family, friends, and co-laborers to encourage each other, to laugh, "to speak to the absurdities and humiliations" that come with oppression, to pray with/pray for each other, and most importantly, to "expand the space that we live in" by stretching its boundaries and transforming the "air" so that we can finally breath.[13]

Rosetta E. Ross's take on traditional communalism also examines space. She echoes Katie Cannon by claiming that womanist religious thought establishes the intellectual space to unearth the hidden treasures buried in the lives of black women.[14] She claims that much of her work "involves uncovering and explicating life-giving norms embedded in black women's moral practices, especially by exploring black women's activism and attending to the pragmatic way many black women activists engage religion."[15] She critiques the lack of communalism within, what she calls, "customary black Christianity." This term refers to the thoughts and actions of active members who

[12] Rosemary Freeney Harding with Rachel Elizabeth Harding, "Hospitality, Haints, and Healing: A Southern African American Meaning of Religion," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 99.

[13] Ibid., 109.

[14] Rosetta E. Ross, "Lessons and Treasures in Our Mothers' Witness: Why I write about Black Women's Activism," *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 115.

[15] Ibid.

regularly attend black churches.[16] Ross argues that the failure of "customary black Christianity" to include critical-analytical and spiritual capacities in its routine religious practices leaves a gaping psychological void that needs to be/and is being filled by content that will help individuals make sense of and assign meaning to their lived experiences.[17]

I think what Ross is trying to establish is that traditional communalism is a pragmatic spirituality that recognizes the need for practices and traditions to evolve, but at the same time is able to attach a communal meaning to the lived experiences of black people as well as respond in a communal fashion to the challenges that face us. In a sense, traditional communalism is rooted in human agency. It helps people realize that they have the power within them to overcome oppression. In other words, traditional communalism helps people recognize their commonality, even with the less fortunate; which tells me that embedded within traditional communalism is the understanding that what affects one affects everyone.

Nancy Lynne Westfield's idea of Walker's second tenet entails ethical considerations that push beyond the preestablished boundary lines of one's chosen community to include a dimension that cares for not only the oppressed, but also the oppressors.[18] She claims, "This epistemology of hope is able to hear the essential gospel no matter where it comes from—even when it comes from the cracked and parched lips

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[16] Ibid., 116.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Nancy Lynne Westfield, "Mama Why…?" A Womanist Epistemology of Hope, in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 134.

of a slave ship captain singing about 'amazing grace.'"[19] She argues that "Black women know we must care for self AND others—it is a 'both/and' reality. . . . This 'both/and' vantage point allows Black women to explode old paradigms of hopelessness and set about the creation of new worlds of liberation, forgiveness, and redemption."[20]

As Alice Walker explains the second tenet of her womanist definition, she explicitly states that a womanist is:

> 2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counter-balance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans.: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."[21]

This second tenet clearly says that womanism supports and affirms heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Therefore, when Walker says that a womanist is "Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female," she is not just referring to race, class, or gender. Womanism also fights for the survival and wholeness of all people, including the civil rights, of those engaged in gay and lesbian relationships. For Walker, this second tenet is about the coming together of a people, sustaining a legacy, restoring pride, being hospitable, renewing our courage, and supporting each other in

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 135.

[21] Walker, xi.

ways that promote authenticity. She discusses the meaning of this second tenet, that Floyd-Thomas calls traditional communalism, in her explanation on what the Civil Rights Movement did for African Americans. Walker says:

> If the Civil Rights Movement is "dead," and if it gave us nothing else, it gave us each other forever. It gave some of us bread, some of us shelter, some of us knowledge and pride, all of us comfort. It gave us our children, our husbands, our brothers, our fathers, as men reborn and with a purpose for living. It broke the pattern of black servitude in this country. It shattered the phony "promise" of white soap operas that sucked away so many pitiful lives. It gave us history and men far greater than Presidents. It gave us heroes, selfless men of courage and strength, for our little boys and girls to follow. It gave us hope for tomorrow. It called us to life.[22]

Here, we see that this second tenet, or as Floyd-Thomas calls it, traditional communalism, involves providing basic needs, knowledge, encouragement, comfort and nurture, purpose, protection, and liberation to those within one's community and I would even go as far to include those outside of one's community because of its "both/and" vantage point.

**Rhetorical Analysis of Cheryl Kirk-Duggan's sermon, "Women of the Cloth,"**

> *Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then, there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.*
>
> **Luke 13:10-13, NIV**

[22] Ibid., 128.

Cheryl Kirk-Duggan's sermon, "Women of the Cloth,"[23] was delivered on March 23, 2006, at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary's Shelton Chapel in Austin, TX, for their Women of the Cloth Conference—Celebrating 50 years of the Ordination of Women to Word and Sacrament, in the Presbyterian Church. Those in attendance were administrators, faculty, staff, students, ministers, and other people from the Austin metropolitan area. Kirk-Duggan is an alumna of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (APTS), so she uses her experience, her knowledge about the seminary, and several humorous moments to relate to her audience. Although Kirk-Duggan has not preached this sermon again, she has preached "five to six versions of the Luke 13:10-13 text."[24] This sermon is approximately twenty-two minutes in length.

*Analysis*

"Women of the Cloth" is a sermon that boldly addresses the attitudinal and behavioral practices that seem to cripple many of us who are in ministry. The sermon begins with the reading of the scripture which recounts the story of how Jesus healed a woman who had been crippled by a spirit and unable to stand up straight for eighteen years. From that text, Kirk-Duggan provides her subject, "Weaving New Cloth: Confronting the Chorus of Bent Over Women," and her thesis, "Each moment we have an opportunity to shift from being busted and bent over to embracing God's anointing as we let go of our brokenness, dream dreams, listen to prophetic voices, and build

[23] Since this sermon has never been published, I have included in my transcription of the sermon, Appendix A, commentary brackets that note the response of the audience from a DVD recording (i.e., clapping, laughing, and shouting). A DVD of this sermon is available in the library of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas.

[24] Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, phone interview by Kimberly P. Johnson, December 8, 2009.

community," according to the Bob Shelton tradition of homiletics.[25] After announcing the thesis, she sings the hymn, "There is a Balm in Gilead," in an operatic voice. The hymn functions as a narrative to help reiterate the claim of her thesis that if we embrace God's anointing, we can shift from being "busted and bent over."[26]

Following the hymn, Kirk-Duggan offers greetings to her audience and immediately establishes her credibility by creating identification with her personal testimony about how she was called to ministry twice and upon the second call, became a student at APTS. This type of identification breaks the ice between a stranger addressing an audience full of students who may not know Kirk-Duggan versus the realization that Kirk-Duggan has walked the same halls, had some of the same professors, and shared in many of the same experiences. She becomes a credible source who can impart wisdom that will help and inspire the current student body, faculty, and administrators.

In the testimony about Kirk-Duggan's calling to the ministry, we see the first instance in which she brings humor into the sermon. She says, "[T]he first time God called me, I said, "No way! If this really is you, you're going to have to do this again." [Laughter] And God did, and a week later I was here on campus wondering what I had gotten myself into."[27] The reason the humor and laughter are significant is that they give us an idea about the audience's reception. The laughter shows us that Kirk-Duggan's words were received by the audience with a positive response. This tells us 1) that the

[25] Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, "Women of the Cloth," March 23, 2006, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Austin, TX (Transcribed by Kimberly P. Johnson, see Appendix A).

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

audience was listening; 2) that the audience was amused; and 3) that audience was laughing with her because she even chuckles and smiles herself.

Following the introduction, Kirk-Duggan directs her attention to the woman in the Luke 13 scripture. She begins to speculate that the woman could have been bent over physically, but she quickly points out that "the text says, that she was bent over by a spirit."[28] Here, the word spirit refers to a demon or a supernatural force that has possessed the woman and crippled her. Therefore, Kirk-Duggan argues that the woman was crippled by a spirit and that the woman's handicap is also a spiritual handicap. Kirk-Duggan takes the crippling spirit and uses it as a metaphor to address the societal oppressions that currently cripple us. We see this in her first main point: "Point one: Sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, faux churchism, and skewed traditions cripple and bust the joy, an image of God in God's people."[29] She makes the argument that all of the above are crippling spirits that spiritually handicap us from experiencing God in our lives, which she calls, joy. Kirk-Duggan points out a causal relationship between the crippling spirit and the woman's relationship with God by saying, "The woman had a crippling spirit. It was stopping the manifestation of God in her life."[30] In other words, the cause of the crippling spirit affected the presence/experience of God in the woman's life and the effect was that signs of God were not evident in her life. This first point coincides with Luke 13:11a, "And just then, there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for 18 years."

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

Kirk-Duggan uses her homiletical imagination to create further identification with the students, but this time by identifying the students with the biblical character. She re-images the woman in the text as "a poor seminary student who was confused . . . and had difficulty in exegesis [Laughing] and wasn't too clear about what it meant to be a Presbyterian in 2006 [Laughing]. She might have been a Presbyterian woman on the journey for 20 or 30 years and still trying to figure out, 'God, was this your joke on me? [Laughter] What's going on? I don't quite get it?'" To re-image the woman of the text tells us that Kirk-Duggan was targeting the students. This allows the students to see themselves in the text because the crippled woman is now a poor seminary student who is having difficulty in her exegetical class while trying to figure out Presbyterian polity at the same time (students learn what it means to be part of their denomination in a polity class). Once she says, "poor seminary student who was confused," the audience started laughing and didn't stop until she said, "I don't quite get it."[31] Kirk-Duggan even smiles at what she is saying several times throughout this section of her sermon. Between her facial expressions and the laughter of the audience, we can deduce that she successfully reached her target audience for this portion of the sermon.

After appealing to the students, Kirk-Duggan draws in the rest of her audience to help them identify with the woman in the text. She states, "Well you see, most people in the world, including church people and seminary professors, are bent over. . . . Beloved, we all have issues [Amen]. Some of us are better at hiding them than others [Laughter]. Some of us are less bent over than others."[32] She tries to get her listeners to understand

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

that everybody is bent over to some degree; and therefore, challenges them to "look in the mirror and take a risk and get to see, do you really know who you are?"[33] Kirk-Duggan is not only asking her audience to see that they too are crippled, but to also recognize the type of crippling spirit(s) in their life.

Similarly to how verse 11 identifies that the woman had a crippling spirit, Kirk-Duggan names the crippling spirits in our lives that block our experiences of God. Here, she begins to culturally critique the various "isms" that cripple people. Kirk-Duggan argues: (Italics added)

> *Sexism* is a crippling spirit that violates and needs to control gender. *Heterosexism* is a crippling spirit that fears God's gift of sensuality and sexualities. *Racism* mocks and violates God's precious, magnificent color and cultural palate of peoples. How dare we not like someone because of the color of their skin. When you think about it, it must really grieve God and it really makes us quite stupid [Laughter]. *Classism* violates and has disdain for the poor and those with less status. And let us be really clear, we don't really want the poor people from the wrong side of the track, who may be a little smelly, sitting on those pews that my mama, or the group from the session, bought for this church. After all, this is First Presbyterian Church; we have our standards [Laughter]. And I tell you, because of that attitude, not only in Presbyterian, but Catholic, and Baptist, and Methodist, and all kinds of churches, Jesus would not be welcomed if he showed up on Sunday. Because *faux churchism* limits our experience of God and condemns the experience of others.[34]

As opposed to just saying that discrimination is morally wrong or that our conscience should suggest that it is unjust, Kirk-Duggan examines the spiritual impact or violation of each crippling "ism." Sexism "violates gender" because it seeks to differentiate between the sexes when equality originally existed; and sexism "needs to control gender" because the person with this spirit is really after power. The spiritual impact of heterosexism is

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

that it "fears God's gift of sensuality and sexualities."[35] People who feel that homosexuality is wrong and sinful are hung up on the fact that God created a female partner for Adam and that the Bible says that homosexuals will not inherit the Kingdom of God.[36] The spirit of racism mocks God—it makes fun of God and disappoints God because it intentionally chooses not to like everybody and to only like a few people based on the color of their skin. Racism also violates God's "color[ful] and cultural palate of peoples" because it causes us to not love all people the same, or at least the way that God loves them.[37] Classism creates a hierarchal structure based on economic status, which also violates God's unconditional love for everyone. Kirk-Duggan defines faux churchism as having "false church."[38] In my mind, it would be equivalent to the times when people play church and pretend to be super spiritual when they are only acting out or mocking what they see others do during church service. By mocking the experiences of others, "faux churchism" inadvertently condemns the experiences of others as well.

In her attempt to heal all of the individuals who have crippling spirits, Kirk-Duggan gives a second challenge to her audience, but this time she is not asking, "Do you really know who you are?"[39] Instead, she wants people to ask themselves, "Who is God in my life? Who am I?" Not what you do, but, "Who are you? Who am I? And, what is God calling you to do today?" For, if you knew that today was the last day of your life

[35] Ibid.

[36] See Genesis 2:22, 1 Corinthians 6:9.

[37] Appendix A.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

on this planet, what would you be doing and what kind of minister would you be?"[40] All of the questions raised have a dual meaning that helps the audience to identify with what is going on in the text. "Who is God in your life" poses the questions," Is God your healer? And, is God your liberator? Jesus, who represents God in the flesh, healed the woman in the text through the laying on of hands and liberated the woman by setting her free from her illness. Hence, this question gets at the identity of God in one's life. "Who am I?" is a two-folded question because Kirk-Duggan spends the beginning of her sermon establishing the fact that the woman in the text is a woman with a crippling spirit and then she uses her first point to name the crippling spirits that handicap us. Therefore, the question first asks: Are you a person with a crippling spirit or a person who can stand up straight? Secondly, it inquires as to whether or not we are sexist, heterosexist, racist, classist, or even one who engages in faux churchism or skewed traditions? "What is God calling you to do today?" really raises the questions, Is God calling you to be healed? And, are you willing and ready to let God set you free? Verses 12-13 say, "When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.' When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God."[41] In other words, Jesus called the woman over to deliver her from the evil spirits and the woman willingly came and allowed him to lay hands on her and heal her. Kirk-Duggan is asking if we are willing to do the same. Finally, she asks, "What kind of minister would you be?" I believe this question asks, would you be a minister who goes around teaching, preaching, calling out demons, healing the sick and fighting against

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, faux churchism, and the crippling spirit of skewed traditions? Kirk-Duggan stays true to her subject matter: "Weaving New Cloth: Confronting the Chorus of Bent Over Women" because her points as well as her rhetorical questions all weave back to the scripture and help to confront the crippling spirits that causes us to become bent over. The weaving process is not a visual image that Kirk-Duggan develops throughout the sermon. Instead, the weaving process takes place as we come to a self-awareness in confronting our own "bent overness."

What we also see in Kirk-Duggan's first point is that she uses inclusive language. She does not assign a masculine pronoun to God. Instead, she uses the possessive form of God to say, ". . . an image of God in God's people."[42] Kirk-Duggan does this throughout the sermon. The only time she attaches a "he" pronoun to the Godhead is when she is referring to Jesus. So she recognizes the masculinity of Jesus, but does not attach any type of masculinity to God. This decision to use inclusive language when talking about God allows the hearers, both males and females, to see themselves as being made in the image of God. Inclusive language also supports the belief that God is a spirit, not a human being with genitalia. Therefore, to take away the masculinity that conventionally gets assigned to God enables women to not just see themselves as being made in God's image, but it allows us to relate to God on a more intimate level. For example, to image God as a father to a woman who was physically abused by her father could serve as a significant hindrance to a woman's spiritual development. But, to disassociate gender, allows people to image or see God for themselves in a way that will advance their own faith.

[42] Ibid.

Moving on to the second main point, Kirk-Duggan claims, "Many of us are bent over by circumstances, fear, and family pathologies."[43] Her first main point names the spirits that cripple us and now her second main point explains how so many of us have become crippled and bent over. She culturally critiques the gender inequality that still exists in some of our churches and argues against conventional views by saying, "women are where we are today and our churches are where we are . . . where they are today because of the other women—it's not so much the men keeping us down."[44] In other words, women's oppression is not a consequence of patriarchy, but rather a result of the complacency of women. This is a significant argument because far too often, women have argued that our male counterparts along with our church disciplines and religious traditions are responsible for the continued oppression of women in the church. Yet, Kirk-Duggan points out that the problem is with the women. She implicitly argues that the women have the power to change their circumstances. The problem appears to be that the women who attend churches that do not support female ordination or leadership have lived with the traditions and practices for so long that they have become complacent with how churches are operated.

In an effort to explain how women become bent over by circumstance, Kirk-Duggan shares the advice that she offers to her Baptist and Catholic women friends about using their own power to change their circumstances. She says:

> I would dare them, two Sundays in a row, just two, to not show up and to not spend a dime, to not send that tithe, and you want . . . you think Joseph Smith had a revelation, it would be no kind of revelation [Clapping, Laughing, and Shouting]. It would be no kind of revelation compared to what would happen in

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

> the American Baptist, Southern Baptist, and the Roman Catholic Church. Pope Benedict would have to make a new encyclical in a heartbeat [Laughter]. Because without women in the church, we do not have church.[45]

What is striking about this particular counsel is that we have a minister (and former pastor) who is telling church members to take two Sundays to not go to church and to not financially support the church in order to see how their power will instantly dismantle the hegemonic structures within the church. Pastors and preachers are known for taking up offerings or "begging for money." But here, Kirk-Duggan solicits the opposite because she is well aware of the fact that women make up the church, which means that women finance the budget. If women stop giving for an extended period of time, the churches will have no choice, but to close down. The idea is that the male leadership, or in this case, Pope Benedict, would rather give up the antiquated practices than subject the church to have to shut its doors forever.

This analogy implicitly communicates to the audience that they too have the power to collectively change their circumstances, but the reason people fail to do so is that they are complacent and scared. Their fear has crippled them. Kirk-Duggan claims, "[T]he problem is, because of patriarchy and misogyny, we as women have been so bent over for so long that we've learned to play the game of passive aggressive. . . . [W]e haven't learned how not to do the passive aggressive thing. And since we haven't learned how to do that, we are often catty among women," which begins to explain some of our pathological behaviors.[46] So, women have become crippled by circumstances due to their passive aggressive behaviors because they are afraid of being aggressive, which

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

has led to the passing down of pathological behaviors through generations. We have passed down our catty behavior of backbiting, cutting each other's throat, and humiliating each other. Plus, we have also chosen to be "closer friends with men than women," which means that we ourselves perpetuate this same behavior against our own gender.[47] She reminds her audience that Jesus would not have behaved in the same way that we do.

Kirk-Duggan posits that "the church [and the academy] cannot move forward until we name, what [she] call[s] patriarchal sexism."[48] "Patriarchal sexism" refers to the "I am jealous syndrome. It's fueled by patriarchy—women don't realize the power they have."[49] She testifies that she "has had some of [her] most difficult times with women who were already in the Academy and should have known better. But, they didn't cuz they were so bent over from the pain that they went through as students during their doctoral programs that they didn't know how to relate to [her], so [she] proved a threat."[50] She intimidated the other professors to the point where they attempted to hinder her own success as a professor. She tells her audience, "But, what they didn't realize is I have a cloud of witnesses in glory and a cloud of witnesses here. And so do you! [Shouting] And therefore, I fear no one!"[51]

Up until this point, we have only heard the names of the spirits that cripple us and been taught how we become crippled by circumstance, fear, and family pathologies. It is only now, that we begin to recognize that we can resist becoming crippled and bent over

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, phone interview by Kimberly P. Johnson, December 8, 2009.

[50] Appendix A.

[51] Ibid.

through the power of faith and courage. Implicit within Kirk-Duggan's testimony is the idea that she was able to overcome her struggles through faith and courage. The "cloud of witness," which comes from the Hebrews 12:1 text, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us," represent a multitude of people in heaven who can testify to their own perseverance in the Christian faith. Hence, she has people, both living and deceased, that she can lean on and look towards for strength and encouragement that she too will persevere. Next, she states, "I'm up here because of the invitation, but the invitation was given because God called me to preach and teach, I really wasn't interested [Laughter]."[52] This statement also resorts back to faith because she had to believe and have faith in what God called her to do. Then, she presents her third challenge by saying, "And I challenge you [Laughter continues], I challenge you to look and see, what is your call and are you still interested? If you're not interested, then maybe it's time for you to do something different. God's people ought not suffer because we're bent over, busted up, and burned out."[53] In essence, she tells her audience that they too have a cloud of witnesses, but in order to avoid becoming bent over, they must have faith—faith that they can persevere and faith in what God has called them to do—along with courage—courage to not be afraid and courage to walk away from ministry when it is time for them to do something different.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

As a prelude into her third main point, Kirk-Duggan makes the claim, "Jesus did not condemn the bent over woman, but he saw her and he named her freedom.[54] In other words, he did not tear down the woman's spirit because of her condition. Instead, he recognized her bondage and set her free. Kirk-Duggan then poses the question to her audience, "How many times have we seen people bent over due to depression, drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, and we refuse to acknowledge them?"[55] She even suggests that when we go to the grocery store, we "act like the cashier is an extension of the cash register," and that we neglect to thank the garbage men for faithfully doing their job.[56] Notice, the term "garbage men" is used as opposed to the more inclusive and more politically correct term, sanitation workers or garbage workers. Maybe, Kirk-Duggan is attempting to balance her feminine examples with a few masculine examples. Whatever the reason, this appears to be the only occupational reference that is attached to a masculine noun. Regardless, the whole point of inquiring whether or not we acknowledge the people around us was for her to get her audience to see that, "God's church cannot be the church until we name the bent overness and help to set people free."[57]

As Kirk-Duggan delves deeper into family pathologies, she argues:

> Many women remain bent over because of their patriarchal and misogynistic conditioning. They've never gotten over the fact that they're not the son that their dads wanted. They've not got the healing and therapy that they needed because they were molested or raped. They've become bitter and so bent over like . . . when they stand up straight, it's still like they're bent over touching their toes.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

> And, when you're bent over and touch your toes, you cannot see what's before you. You can only see what's beneath and behind.[58]

To identify the "bent overness" as patriarchal and misogynistic conditioning is not male-bashing because she is not degrading men, Kirk-Duggan is simply naming the source of the problem. Hence, she qualifies her comment by saying, many women have "never gotten over the fact that they're not the son that their dads wanted," or "They've not got the healing and therapy that they needed because they were molested or raped;" which means that these women were rejected by their fathers to a certain extent, they were abused, and objectified—the women were "bent over." Here, Kirk-Duggan calls attention to the fact that "when you're bent over and touch your toes, you cannot see what's before you. You can only see what's beneath and behind."[59] Women who are not healed and have not come to grips with being raped or molested can only see what is beneath and behind because they are in bondage to their present and past situation. In the black community, and especially in ministry, it is considered taboo for individuals, even ministers, to seek psychological or psychiatric counsel. One is expected to be strong in challenging situations and to have enough faith to overcome catastrophe. So, to even suggest that people need therapy is liberating in itself.

Kirk-Duggan emphasizes the necessity of liberating people from what binds them to their past. She claims people who are "bent over" are in bondage to their past and present situation. This is why verses 12-13 of the Luke text are so significant, "*When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.' When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising*

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

*God."* Jesus set the woman free. The woman was no longer in bondage to a crippling spirit. The woman could stand up straight because she could finally see beyond her past and present condition. This helps to illustrate Kirk-Duggan's point that "set[ting] people free is the fundamental key of salvation."[60] As she provides further biblical examples, she says, "Jesus did not sit down and write a ten volume set of dogmatics [Laughing]. Jesus said, they're hungry, let me kind of multiply some of this fish and bread. They can't see, let me slap some mud on their eyes so they can. What are you doing to feed the hungry—spiritually hungry, physically, mentally, emotionally hungry?"[61] When Jesus saw a need, he met the need. She says, "it's not enough to teach and preach Jesus is Lord because if their stomachs are growling too loud, if they're hurting too bad, the noise of their pain will drown out any message of the gospel that you preach."[62] Therefore, one must also live the gospel message because, according to Kirk-Duggan, "Freedom is more than eschatology, it is lived reality."[63]

The discussion of freedom as a "lived reality" provides a segue into Kirk-Duggan's last main point because her goal is to get her audience to embrace this "lived reality" by naming and dealing with our own "bent overness." She argues:

> Point three: as friends, faculty, staff, and students of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, let us press on to embrace the legacy of women who hear the call of God and experience ordination to a variety of ministries. As we choose to be set free in Christ Jesus, as we name the pathologies, and work for justice through the power of the Holy Spirit. To be church means, discerning all the bent overness and deal with them. Starting first with ourselves.[64]

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

This final point is structurally more complex than the first two main points because Kirk-Duggan uses multiple-compound sentences to make her argument instead of one simple sentence or one complex sentence. Here, she names the various groups of people in her audience so that they will know that she is calling the entire community to action—"to embrace the legacy of women who hear the call of God and experience ordination to a variety of ministries. . . . to be set free in Christ Jesus, . . . [to] name the pathologies, and work for justice through the power of the Holy Spirit."[65] Then, she provides her own definition of what it means "to be church." So, she is not only calling the entire community to action, she wants them to fully understand what it means to be part of that community. To be church, they must discern and deal with all of the "bent overness" including their own. Kirk-Duggan offers examples of how we neglect to recognize our own "bent overness" by imprisoning ourselves to drugs, alcohol, people, other people's opinions, big churches, big cars, and all that stuff. She notes, "you aren't really saved, cuz you're not really free; which ties into her earlier statement that, "That is pathological, that is not salvation." [66] In other words, being imprisoned to someone or something is not freedom because freedom is salvation. So, she helps the audience to name their pathologies.

Next, Kirk-Duggan explains that "we can't talk about being the people of God [or the church] if we don't live the people of God."[67] Here, she calls the community into accountability. She reminds the wealthy parishes to look beyond the good work that they

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

are doing and she reminds the seminary students that it is a privilege to go to school, "So, if you're going to be here, choose to be here, choose to learn."[68] She also reminds the faculty members that they need to familiarize themselves with new ways of teaching because she considers teaching a privilege as well. Here, her purpose is to help the entire community, the students, and the faculty to recognize their "bent overness," deal with it, and to get over it. Throughout this entire section of the sermon, the audience laughs with her and shouts in agreement with what she is saying because they know that what she says is true.

Then, as Kirk-Duggan begins to close out her sermon, she takes her audience back to the passive aggressive behavior that comes from patriarchy and misogyny, but this time the passive aggressive behavior of the church. She admits, "I love to wax eloquently with theory, but if my theory cannot somehow be converted to praxis, I'm in trouble and I'm not helping anybody.[69] After which, she poses the question, "So, what are we willing to do to be free from our "bent overness?" What will each of you do today, not tomorrow because you may be dead tonight?"[70] She is asking, are you willing to name the pathologies, are you willing to work for justice, are you willing to discern all the "bent overness," not just yours, but the "bent overness" of the church, and are you willing to deal with it? Her question indicates a sense of urgency because she is asking about their actions for today, not tomorrow. It is so easy to say that we will perform a deed tomorrow, but the problem is that tomorrow does not always come. Likewise, Kirk-

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

Duggan is concerned about today because any one of us could be dead tonight and not take the opportunity to be set free in Christ Jesus from our own crippling spirits and "bent overness."

Following this inquiry, Kirk-Duggan quotes Dr. Cynthia Campbell, who said that morning, "We are bent over when others are silenced around us and when we do not pay attention to race and class and culture."[71] This means that we will not be free until all of us are free—until everyone is granted a voice to speak. We will also not be free until we stop neglecting or being passive aggressive about the injustices that people experience due to race, class, and culture.

The sermon ends with Kirk-Duggan's blessing upon the people. She says, "Beloved, this is our day—tomorrow, standing up straight, tomorrow grace, tomorrow freedom, tomorrow love. What are you willing to do for there is a balm in Gilead? God bless you (Amen)."[72] To declare, "this is our day" and then lead with blessings that talk about tomorrow is not a negation of the importance of today. I believe this serves as an affirmation of what the people will experience from making the decision to be set free from their "bent overness." As a result of their decision today, she informs them that tomorrow, they will stand up straight; tomorrow, they will experience grace, freedom, and love. Another reason why I think this is a blessing of affirmation is because she then repeats her question, "What are you willing to do;" but this time, she avows "for there is a balm in Gilead." She strategically connects the lyrics of her opening hymn with the

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

rhetorical question to remind her audience that there is someone who can make them whole. And, with her final words, "God Bless you," she blesses them again.[73]

In this sermon, Kirk-Duggan has sought to nurture, protect, and liberate the women of the cloth from their crippling spirits that keep them bound to their past and present situations. The sermon educates people in ministry about their internal societal oppressions, or internal "isms," and pathological behaviors which hinder their future growth. Kirk-Duggan liberates her audience by helping them to realize that they have the power to overcome their oppression and by encouraging them to embrace their salvation by living out the message of the gospel. She claims, "To be church means discerning all the 'bent overness' and deal with it."[74] In order for the audience to truly be the church, they must be free from bondage—they must individually deal with their internal oppressions and pathological behaviors to free themselves so they can be the church and set others free. Traditional communalism is about affirming, nurturing, protecting, and liberating the community.

*The Womanist Characteristics*

According to Kirk-Duggan, womanist preaching "involves 'illustrative story-preaching' that tells of God's activity in the world, meant to affirm, inspire, provide hope, and confirm God's nearness to an oppressed people."[75] She says, "Womanist preaching is living ritual, committed to deep change and healing."[76] To preach from a womanist

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, "Prophesied, Sanctified Performed Praxis: Womanist Preaching," (working paper, Womanist Preaching, Faculty of Theology and Women's Studies, Shaw University Divinity School, Raleigh, 1999), 13.

[76] Ibid., 12.

perspective means to live a life of proclaimed justice, joy, peace, humbleness, with prophetic candor, and innocent delight amidst complex issues and sometimes dangerous people. Womanist preaching may expose the wrongdoing of those who would rather live a lie." [77] She argues that that this form of preaching "incorporates Womanist biblical hermeneutics towards searching to help people be responsible, engaging their capacities to think as they are inspired where they can listen, and then incarnate freedom, dignity, and justice of all people, communally and individually."[78]

One of the most important characteristics of womanist preaching is naming the oppressive forces that confront women—identifying the source(s) of oppression. We see this in all three of her main points. She identifies and then culturally critiques the oppressive forces that continue to cripple God's people. To name oppression allows one to confront oppression. Kirk-Duggan claims that "Womanist preachers must be willing to name, expose, and call out the harm, the evil, the wrong doing" because she sees womanist preachers as agents of change.[79] In doing so, her goal is to shift her audience from being people who are bent over to actually being people who can embrace God's anointing. In order to do this, she names the crippling spirits, explains how we become crippled, and then encourages us to embrace the legacy of those who have gone before us. Kirk-Duggan also names the pathological behaviors that get passed down through the generations by discussing the alienation that exists between genders.

[77] Ibid., 5.

[78] Ibid., 10.

[79] Ibid., 5, 13.

Although the sermon is entitled, "Women of the Cloth," Kirk-Duggan discusses the crippling effects of each "ism" in such a way that the sermon becomes applicable to everyone. The universality of the sermon identifies it as a sermon that is committed to the survival and wholeness of all people in ministry—male, female, black, white, Hispanic, Native American, Asian, Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian. What helps to make the message universal would be the relevant subject matter, the line of questioning that Kirk-Duggan uses, the narratives she employs, the pronouns she uses, and the inclusive language that she uses in her line of questioning. Every culture, race, ethnicity, religious group, and academic body has traditions that hinder them from future success. In the sermon, Kirk-Duggan identifies what prevents the people of God (the church) from truly being the people of God (the church) and what prevents those in the Academy from doing what they have been called to do. In terms of the line of questioning, Kirk-Duggan believes "Womanist preaching is interrogatory in that the entire process is one of dialogue and questions, of questions and dialogue."[80] As a result, she asks questions that are not predicated on gender because she is trying to free all of her audience members from their "bent overness" so that they might free others. To do this, she incorporates first person and first person plural pronouns (I, my, we, us) along with the second person and second person possessive pronouns (you, your) in her questions to the audience. She poses more than thirty questions to her audience members that mostly ask: are we, are you, what is your, and do you? This way, everyone in the audience is invited to ask themselves the questions that are raised.

[80] Ibid., 5.

Another womanist characteristic is the fact that the sermon speaks from a "both/and" vantage point. Like Westfield, Kirk-Duggan recognizes that we must both care for ourselves and others. Therefore, she does not narrow her focus to only target the women. While each of her challenges require introspection, she also asks questions such as: "[A]re you willing to be free so that you can help others to be free?" and "When was the last time you had a Native person or a Hispanic or an African American person preach at your church? Teach at your church? How many of you all have Black neighbors or Brown neighbors or Asian neighbors that you really talk to?" [81] There is this sense of probing going on that wants to find out not only what are we doing for ourselves, but what are we doing for other people?

## Conclusion: A Comparison and Contrast of Rhetorical Strategies between Traditional Communalism & Radical Subjectivity

The major rhetorical similarities between the two types of sermons—the traditional communalism sermon by Cheryl Kirk-Duggan and the radical subjectivity sermons Elaine Flake and Gina Stewart—is their aim is to heal those who are wounded or crippled, which requires people to take a similar form of action (there is an agency component); and they rely heavily on identifying the biblical character with the experiences of their audience members.

Agency, the ability to work or act on behalf of self or community, appears to have a strong role in womanist preaching. Kirk-Duggan's sermon constantly inquires of its audience members by asking them to assess themselves, asking them are they willing to be set free so that they can help set others free, asking them what are they doing for other

[81] Appendix A.

people, and asking them to transform their behavior. Flake's sermon moves people to action by affirming the power that lies in deciding that we have had enough, telling us to put our Jacobs in proper perspective, and then telling us that sometimes we have to fight for our deliverance. Stewart points out some of our faults—that we sometimes invest too much time and energy into relationships and that we suffer from wounded self-esteem because we mistakenly base our own worth off of what others think about us. So, she encourages us to take our power back by changing our attitude and deciding that enough is enough.

Furthermore, the preachers are able to create identification between the biblical characters and their audience members through the use of metaphors. Kirk-Duggan uses the "crippling spirit" metaphor to discuss the negative effects of sexism, heterosexism, racism, and faux churchism that currently affect those in ministry. In other words, she re-images the text to make the crippling spirits fit today's experiences. Flake talks about domestic violence in such a way that she creates images of war with the help of the storyline from the movie, *Enough*, which pits husband against wife and uses language to establish that the couple is fighting back and forth and the husband is trying to kill the wife. She relates to women who are in abusive relationships and then uses light-dark metaphors such as fairytale/nightmare and love/abuse to show the past as positive existence and the present as a dreary and negative existence, so that we will choose to transform our lives back into a more positive existence. Stewart uses the name of the biblical character, Jacob, as a metaphor, which Flake does as well, to symbolize the people that we allow into our lives to give us our self-esteem. They all use imagery to connect to the real life experiences of today.

The major difference between traditional communalism and radical subjectivity is that with traditional communalism, the focus is simultaneously on self and community whereas, when it comes to radical subjectivity, the focus is always on self. In looking at the element of agency, traditional communalism has a "both/and" vantage point that pushes people toward improving self and improving their relationship with others (community), so that communities or groups of people can and will continue to thrive. With radical subjectivity "self" is always the subject. How is the person improving self? What is the person doing to mature? Has the person come to an epiphany about self? Radical subjectivity spends a lot of time affirming self, while traditional communalism has a broader reach because it not only affirms "self," it affirms the relational bonds with other people. Radical subjectivity sermons lend themselves toward moving the audience from victim to victor, whereas traditional communalism sermons lend themselves toward some form of communal healing and communal remembrance to live out the Christian faith. In rhetorical terms, this is like a Jeremiad because this type of sermon calls people back to the values of their community after they have broken the covenant of their community.

In the next chapter, I examine the rhetorical strategies that are necessary when a preacher seeks to remove the shame that society has placed upon an individual, or change society's perception about a person.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## REDEMPTIVE SELF-LOVE

> *[A]n assertion of the humanity, customs, and aesthetic value of Black women in contradistinction to the commonly held stereotypes characteristic of white solipsism. The admiration and celebration of the distinctive and identifiable beauty of Black women. "I'm black and beautiful O ye daughters of Jerusalem." Song of Solomon 1:5, NRSV.*[1]

This chapter examines both the meaning of redemptive self-love, the term Stacey Floyd-Thomas uses to describe the third tenet of womanism, and the application of it in a sermon. First, I will begin by explaining how Floyd-Thomas defines this term, how her colleagues define this term, followed by how Alice Walker originally defined this third tenet of womanism. Second, I will offer a close reading of a sermon delivered by a womanist preacher who illuminates the meaning of redemptive self-love. Melva L. Sampson's sermon, "Hell No!" taken from The Book of Esther 1:1-12, challenges the societal view of a woman who is commonly perceived as a villain and re-envisions that woman as a heroine. Third, I will juxtapose Sampson's sermon with key rhetorical strategies from Flake's sermon and Stewart's sermon to uncover both the similarities and differences between redemptive self-love and radical subjectivity, since self-love seems to be at the heart of both tenets.

*Defining Redemptive Self-Love*

Redemptive Self-Love, the term that Floyd-Thomas uses to describe the third tenet of womanism, employs autobiographical and/or spiritual trajectories to speak to the ways in which womanists are able to "assert the importance of self-reflexivity and

[1] Floyd-Thomas, 143.

cultural metaphor as a redemptive project of Black womanhood."[2] Redemptive self-love examines the ability to unashamedly love self and stand up for self, even against the stereotypes held by those in power/white power. I recognize that this individual is not on a journey toward self-love because she already loves herself *regardless*. Regardless of what anyone else thinks, this individual is going to enjoy life, stick to her beliefs, and look out for herself to make sure that she is not taken advantage of. This individual has a strong sense of who she is, so she guards against others trying to make her into who she is not. The redemptive aspect is that it lifts the shame, dishonor, disgrace, and condemnation that society has placed upon this woman. Consequently, redemptive self-love sermons urge women to match their human agency and moral agency with a rhetorical agency—an emphatic oral expression—in order to reclaim their voice.

According to Kelly Brown Douglas, womanism "verified the power of the black female voice to speak with authority about the complicated and wonderfully 'adventurous' reality of being embodied black and woman."[3] Womanism gave her "the voice to speak out of [her] own experience of pain and struggle;" it also "allowed her to stand with [her] black female sisters as they also struggled to find their way, their voice, and their place."[4] She explains how reading Alice Walker's definition connected with her in her places of pain, struggle, trying to fit in, and trying to be herself and love

[2] Ibid., 9.

[3] Kelly Brown Douglas, "Twenty Years a Womanist: An Affirming Challenge," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 146.

[4] Ibid.

herself, "regardless."[5] For Douglas, the most significant aspect of womanism is its dialogical nature, which is found in the second tenet of Walker's womanist definition—"'Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?' Ans.: 'Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented' and . . . 'Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.' Reply: 'It wouldn't be the first time.'"[6] Douglas addresses the "dialogical nature" of womanism, primarily that of the later excerpt, in order to make meaning out of redemptive self-love.

In "Twenty Years a Womanist: An Affirming Challenge," Douglas argues that womanist dialogue (redemptive self-love) must privilege the everyday experiences of black women, reflect the privileged dialogue of black women in the black church, necessitate a moral agency as well as an existential moral commitment, counter the normative view of sexuality, and affirm the voices of the weak and powerless.[7] This type of "epistemological privilege" that womanism gives to everyday black women "readily challenges notions of knowledge," and at the same time, "compels womanist scholars to recognize that knowledge is not simply that which has been legitimated by the standards of a white patriarchal academy. . . ."[8] Womanist dialogue also elucidates the meaning of moral agency. Douglas defines moral agency as the "efforts to frustrate and dismantle any systems or structures based on unjust privilege, such as the privilege of being white,

[5] Ibid., 145.

[6] Walker, xi.

[7] Douglas, 147-149, 151-152.

[8] Ibid., 147.

of being male, and/or of being heterosexual."[9] Womanist dialogue (redemptive self-love) must forthrightly engage in "frustrating and 'debunking' heterosexist structuring and delegitimating homophobic rhetoric so that women and men can love as they choose to love—a love that begins with the ability to 'love themselves, regardless.'"[10] This is done by challenging views of sexuality that only affirm "reproductive" sexual expression. Womanist dialogue affirms those who have been marginalized—it does not matter what gender, race, ethnicity, class, or sexuality; womanism seeks to redeem and uplift the oppressed.

Throughout Douglas's article, she constructs a framework to describe her own understanding of what womanist scholarship looks like if it is attempting to reflect this third tenet of womanism. She claims that womanist scholarship (redemptive self-love) must:

> Affirm that *authentic* knowledge is that knowledge which is intimately connected to life sustaining and liberating activity
>
> Point out the specious reality of discourses of power
>
> Work from our spaces of discomfort, not privilege
>
> Oppose, and certainly not collude with, human oppression, whether or not the oppression is racially coded or gender based
>
> Challeng[e] the view of sexuality that permeates black churches
>
> Restore the connection between sexual intimacy and loving relationship[11]

[9] Ibid., 150.

[10] Ibid., 152.

[11] Ibid., 147-148, 150-152, 155.

For Douglas, womanist scholarship, more specifically, womanist dialogue that reflects redemptive self-love must affirm authentic knowledge, confront discourses of power, oppose all forms of oppression, and restore the viewpoint that sexuality is not sinful, it is sacred.

Karen Baker-Fletcher's understanding of redemptive self-love is explained in her article, "A Womanist Journey," which discusses her voyage from self-identifying as a feminist to self-identifying as a womanist. She argues that "a womanist is never a white woman or a white feminist, because womanism emerges from what Katie Cannon calls 'the real-lived experiences' of black women or women of color in response to experiences of modern slavery, racism, segregation, colonization, and Globalization."[12] Yet, she is open to other women of color identifying as a womanist as long as they are "*in authentic relationships of mutuality, equality, and respect with black women*."[13] White feminists who attempt to appropriate the womanist identity actually disassociate its original socio-historical and cultural contexts.[14] Baker-Fletcher claims, "[t]he goal is to develop relationships of mutuality while respecting boundaries."[15] Then she gives the example:

> One of my responses to white women who want to *be* womanists, rather than advocate womanist thought, has been, "Are you willing to stop identifying as 'white' and live *every* moment of your life as a black woman?" In order to do this, one would have to be black in *community with black people*, with all that means: self-identity in the workplace, with friends, in the neighborhood, shopping, in worship, with family, etc. It entails giving up *every* vestige of white

[12] Ibid., 161-162.

[13] Ibid., 163.

[14] Ibid., 166.

[15] Ibid., 167.

> privilege, including skin color, when mistaken for white I have not met anyone who was willing to give up white racial privilege to this degree.[16]

When white women attempt to become womanists this is seen as "disrespect for the freedom to be collectively self-naming as black women or women of color" because they are ignoring the boundaries of womanism, which then becomes oppressive—they want to control black women's self-identity—which is an issue of power and ownership.[17] For Baker-Fletcher, redemptive self-love appears in her ability to stand by her convictions of not letting others, particularly white feminists, control her self-identity; and her conviction to not worship the earth, but God, whose Spirit is in everything and everybody, including the earth.

Cheryl Kirk-Duggan examines "relationality" rooted in Walker's definition, bell hook's notion of "killing rage," and the Christian value of love in order to bring clarity to her meaning of redemptive self-love. She identifies three categories by which we engage or thwart relationships: a spirituality of aesthetics, an incarnated holistic vision, and parasitic oppression.[18] A *Womanist* spirituality reveals the "vital, expressive, revolutionary, embodied, personal communal resistance-based way of life and theoretical discourse, based upon the rich lived, yet oppressed, experience of black women from the African diaspora, who as social beings in relationship with the Divine, celebrate life and

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, "Quilting Relations with Creation: Overcoming, Going Through, and Not Being Stuck," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 178.

expose injustice and malaise."[19] A Womanist holistic vision "builds on the context of an aesthetic spirituality to embrace an imaginative epistemology and a transformative attitude, while building a concrete methodology."[20] A transformative attitude requires that one exists "in the tension of contrariness, hate, and miseducation, while drawing on a spiritual richness of love and beauty, communal resourcefulness and generosity, and justice with tolerance."[21] A *Womanist* aesthetic spirituality "exposes personalities and practices of parasitic oppression. These include any category of human interaction where those with power manipulate, abuse, and misuse another, including but not limited to classism, sexism, heterosexism, racism, ageism, and ableism."[22] Kirk-Duggan echoes the ideas of bell hooks and her notion of *Killing rage* by saying:

> The antithesis of engaged rage is consensual victimhood. To defy such victimhood, we must engage in a language of self-determination, as we struggle to end racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist domination. *Killing rage* is an electrifying tool for change, a catalyst viable for public and private sectors; for nurturing healthy relationships, relationships rooted in love.[23]

In other words, "killing rage" can be either a destructive or creative force because we have the power to decide if we want to comply or resist, be pessimistic or hopeful, be stagnant or strive for healthy relationships.[24] When "killing rage" becomes a creative force, it empowers us to act out of love, agape love, which is unconditional love.

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 179.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 179-180.

[23] Ibid., 180.

[24] Ibid.

Kirk-Duggan identifies agape love as the term that "encapsulates the Womanist motif to always act out of love."[25] Agape is "spiritual, not sexual in its nature;" it is seen as "selfless and a model for humanity," and it is "[Christian] love as revealed in Jesus."[26] This love ethic requires us to have love even for our enemies. Agape love is ultimately self-love because it forces us to love others as we love ourselves. According to Kirk-Duggan, Jesus expressed this very notion in teaching the great commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself."[27] She argues that the paradox of this type of love is that "one must have the capacity to love one's self to love the neighbor, to see the sacred, the divine image in another regardless of their behavior." [28]

Ultimately, Kirk-Duggan recognizes that redemptive self-love entails agape love, or unconditional love, because it commands us love others as we love ourselves. But, what makes this self-love redemptive is how womanists strategize and organize for the uplift of the survival and wholeness both individually and communally. She recounts the stories of slave women that document the violence and abuse they experienced at the hands of their slave masters and mistresses. Yet, these women were able to embody redemptive self-love when they "quilted together their religious, spiritual, and aesthetic resources to survive, to develop self-esteem, to protect them, to bolster their total health, to speak truth, and to love themselves, regardless. These women, who used their

[25] Ibid., 181.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 182; See also Matthew 22:37-40.

[28] Ibid., 182.

suspicion to explore situations and to be leery of naïve idealism that did not support their realities and values, are the ancestors of *Womanist* scholars."[29]

In Shani Settles's description of redemptive self-love, she argues, "To love the spirit, self, folk, music, dance, the moon, struggle, food, and roundness 'Regardless' is to walk the path of light with enlightened ancestors and Spirit while fulfilling one's given destiny."[30] Settles explores how African Derived Religions (ADRs) can serve as a significant resource to advance Womanist thought and praxis since they "demand revolutionary forms of 'loving' that discursively produce 'conscientization.' The modes of resistance in ADRs equip individuals to be able to claim to "self and the dominant hegemony: I am not who you say or imagine me to be and then reconstitute[e] or reconstruct [themselves] through an Afrocentric lens."[31]

Settles examines the modes of resistance by exploring the representations and attributes of Osun, a popularly imaged prototypical "love goddess," an "African Venus" or "Afrodite," she is the essence of passion and beauty itself.[32] As a result of ethnic masking, she is situated within the motif of a white "love goddess" whose image and value are constructed via white cultural standards. She becomes an honorary white woman who represents beauty, power, and being.[33] Settles argues, "In this popular view, Osun foregrounds the hegemonic imperative to eradicate Blackness as a color and

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[29] Ibid., 184-185.

[30] Shani Settles, "The Sweet Fire of Honey: Womanist Visions of Osun as a Methodology of Emancipation," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 192; See also Walker, xi-xii.

[31] Floyd-Thomas, 195.

[32] Ibid., 196.

[33] Ibid.

ontology. Yet, this raced imagery is secondary to Osun's reduction to a hypersexual being. . . . She is depicted as exotic, erotic, wild, deviant, and available to all."[34] Settles claims that the "power and import of a first level semiotic reading of Osun as a colonized figure is the ability to focus viewers' attention" on the particular qualities that are assigned to a specific group of individuals.[35] Then, with a second level reading of Osun as a highly sexed figure, "Osun allows Black women to scrutinize the hegemonic/neocolonial social matrix to view shifting realities of cultural devaluation, social segregation, political exclusion, and economic degradation."[36] In this second reading, Osun emerges as a source of/for power because her degraded sexuality becomes reimaged into a "revolutionary love" for self.

> In "loving" herself deeply and fully, Osun is posited as undertaking the quest to manifest self-respect and self-determination in a world that fosters the internalization of hatred and contempt. . . . Osun articulates a radical liberationist project to Black women: in loving self at all costs, one is ushered into transformative ways of seeing and being regardless. . . . Osun's model of revolutionary love challenges us to be conscious, ethical, and authentic in all spheres of reality.[37]

Settles defines revolutionary love as the "'lifeforce' or mechanism of action that challenges Black women not only to celebrate themselves," but each other.[38]

Ultimately, Settles recognizes redemptive self-love as: 1) the ability to love self at all costs; 2) the ability to say, "I am not who you say or imagine me to be;" and 3) the

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid; See also Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 136.

[36] Settles, 196-197.

[37] Ibid., 198.

[38] Ibid.

ability to reconstitute or construct self identity by deconstructing Eurocentric patriarchal codes and structures.[39] She suggests, "Osun clearly illustrates that loving self incites one to fully and deeply love one another, humanity, and life itself."[40] Love becomes the transformative key toward liberation.

Alice Walker describes this third tenet of her womanist definition as a woman who "Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless."[41] In other words, redemptive self-love loves self at all costs—even at the expense of being misunderstood, degraded, or vilified. Redemptive self-love causes individuals to resist the social constructs of others by operating out of who they themselves say that they are.

**Rhetorical Analysis of Melva L. Sampson's sermon, "Hell No!"**

> *This happened in the days of Ahasuerus, the same Ahasuerus who ruled over one hundred twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia. In those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his officials and minister. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were present, while he displayed the great wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and pomp of his majesty for many days, one hundred eighty days in all.*
>
> *When these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in the citadel of Susa, both great and small, a banquet lasting for seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. There were white cotton curtains and blue hangings tied with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and colored stones. Drinks were served in golden goblets, goblets of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. Drinking was by flagons, without restraint; for the king had given orders to all the officials of his palace to do as each one desired.*

[39] Ibid., 195, 198, 201.

[40] Ibid., 198.

[41] Walker, xii.

*Furthermore, Queen Vashti gave a banquet for the women in the palace of King Ahasuerus.*

*On the seventh day, when the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who attended him, to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing the royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the officials her beauty; for she was fair to behold. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command conveyed by the eunuchs.*

**Esther 1:1-12, NRSV**

Melva L. Sampson's sermon, "Hell No!" focuses on Queen Vashti's refusal to fulfill the King's request and the implications of what that means for her as well as other women. I believe what makes this an example of redemptive self-love is Queen Vashti's ability to love herself regardless—no matter the cost. This sermon challenges us to resist objectification and resist being boxed in to the social constructs of who others say that we are and how others think we should behave. Following the sermon analysis, this chapter will juxtapose Sampson's sermon with key rhetorical strategies from Flake's sermon and Stewart's sermon to uncover the rhetorical similarities and to discover the differences between redemptive self-love and radical subjectivity since the two are closely related because they both focus on self-love.

Sampson's sermon, "Hell No!" was first delivered, in 2007, at Sankofa United Church of Christ (UCC), which is an African-centered ministry in Atlanta, Georgia. On the day of delivery, Sampson preached this twenty to twenty-five minute sermon to approximately fifteen people whose ages ranged from 0-65 years of age.[42] The second time Sampson preached this sermon was at the American Baptist College for the Nannie

[42] Melva Sampson, email message to author, March 4, 2010.

Helen Burroughs Luncheon.[43] When asked what gave her the courage to title her sermon, "Hell No!" she said:

> [She] went to see the musical, *The Color Purple*, when it first debuted in Atlanta, and that there is a title song called "Hell No!" . . . and [she] loves that song. One day [she] was reading over that text [Esther 1:1-12] . . . [which she has] preached . . . before on numerous occasions under different titles and when [she] read the part, verse 12, where the eunuch asks Vashti to come to see the King, [she] remembers saying out loud, Hell No! And, ever since that day, [she] decided if [she] were to ever preach the sermon again, [she] would title it that [—"Hell No!"]. Part of it was the shock-and-awe value and the adamant absolute stand against oppressive, nature, order, systems.[44]

When Sampson first preached this sermon at Sankofa UCC, she says, "The congregation was such that [she] knew it [the title] would be acceptable."[45] But, the second time this sermon was delivered, she says "It could have appeared risky . . . [because] when she preached it at American Baptist College, they were shocked. The audience's response at the title was 'What did she say?' . . . and [she] said it again." Although some may be shocked by its title, as Sampson continues to preach this sermon in the future, she will keep the title, "Hell No!"

*Analysis*

"Hell No!" is a racy sermon that creatively emphasizes the point, "Material gain, position, and status are never worth giving one's soul away."[46] It is the shortest out of all five sermons considered in this dissertation, but in its brevity, Sampson is able to counter patriarchal dominance, bring a marginalized voice to the forefront, and address the

[43] Melva Sampson, phone interview by Kimberly P. Johnson, March 5, 2010.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Melva Sampson, "Hell No!" in Those Preaching Women: A Multicultural Collection, eds. Ella Pearson Mitchell and Valerie Bridgeman Davis (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2008), 30.

importance of loving and saving one's self. The sermon begins with the focal text verse 12, "But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command conveyed by the eunuchs" and is quickly followed by lyrics from the song "Hell No!" in the musical, *The Color Purple*, adapted from Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, and Steven Spielberg's film, *The Color Purple*.

> Girl child ain't safe in a family o' mens.
> Sick 'n tired how a woman still live like a slave.
> You better learn how to fight back while you still alive . . .
> But he try to make me mind and I just ain't that kind . . .
> Hell no![47]

These lyrics, which are taken from two different stanzas, call attention to the predatory, oppressive, and abusive nature of some men that women, particularly African American women, encounter. The first line, "Girl child ain't safe in a family o' mens," references the dangers of incest when a little girl is left in the presence of her male relatives. *The Color Purple* sheds light on this unfortunate reality in the African American community of little girls being raped at the hands of their fathers. The story is about a young girl named Celie, who writes letters to God because her father beats her and rapes her. As a result of the incest, Celie gives birth to a daughter and son. She later becomes a battered wife and eventually learns how to stand up for herself and fight back. So when the musical character, Sofia, sings about how little girls are not safe, which is a saying that has passed down through so many black families, the danger is incest and the result is that these little girls become pregnant. The second line, "Sick 'n tired how a woman still live like a slave" invokes the tragedy of slavery, when the white male was the master over blacks, and it implies that the role of African American men has changed to the point that they now act as masters over their wives/women. Whatever the man says goes

[47] Ibid., 27.

and the woman must always oblige. Then, Sofia sings this third line, "You better learn how to fight back while you still alive . . ." because she is trying to encourage Celie to stand up for herself and to stop taking the abuse. The fourth line of this musical excerpt pertains to Sofia's own life. Sofia is referring to her husband, Harpo, who tries to box her in to make her act a certain way, but she refuses to conform. Hence, her emphatic, "Hell No!"

Sampson uses excerpts from the "Hell No!" lyrics as a bridge into her narrative around her grandmother Nez's, kitchen table. Here, she defines what "Hell no!" means. She says that in her family, "'Hell no!' signaled an emphatic refusal used to express discontent toward a person, place, or thing. . . . 'Hell no!' was a saying or righteous indignation, the opposite of blasphemy but an acknowledgment of the reverence for ourselves as wholly holy and without restraint to resist whatever sought to silence our voices. . . . [It was] grown woman's talk."[48] Next, she provides real-life situations when Sampson, her grandmother, and her mother responded with an emphatic "Hell no!" The womanist dialogue begins with the time big momma, Nez, said 'Hell no!' when asked if she would "honor and obey" her husband. Sampson's "mother said, "Hell no!" when the pastor summoned . . . her to consider staying with [Sampson's] father."[49] And finally, when Sampson was asked "if [she] would preach from the floor because the pulpit was reserved for male authority, . . . [she] vehemently replied, 'Hell no!'"[50]

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 28.

[50] Ibid.

Sampson uses all of these "Hell no!" sayings from the musical and from the women in her family, who were influenced by Nez, to theoretically justify the plausibility of her anecdote—"When I read Vashti's story, I think of Nez, who, if she had been with Vashti after hearing the king's request, surely would have looked at the queen and given her the royal nod to repeat after her and say, 'Hell no!'"[51] Immediately, Queen Vashti becomes familiar to Sampson because she places Queen Vashti on a first name basis, similar to what she does with the women of her family (i.e., Nez). Then, by creatively inserting Nez into the biblical text not only encourages Queen Vashti in her attempt to save herself, but it also gives her a voice. Verse 12 says, "Vashti refused to come . . . ." In other words, the scripture only records Queen Vashti's defiant behavior; it does not give her a voice. Queen Vashti's behavior is what tells us that she said, "No." Therefore, to insert Nez into the text to encourage the queen to respond in righteous indignation with an emphatic, "Hell no!" would match her human agency and her moral agency with a rhetorical agency that would reclaim her voice. Redemptive self-love calls one to make a proclamation to self and a proclamation to the dominant hegemonic powers at work.[52] This verbal proclamation would emphasize the queen's resistance to being objectified and humiliated by her husband.

At this point, the sermon begins to unfold the narrative of the text in order to provide the background information surrounding Queen Vashti's decision. Sampson discusses how The Book of Esther opens by describing a 180-day "shindig," or party, that King Ahasureus holds to celebrate his recent conquests and then she reveals that he has

[51] Ibid.

[52] Settles, 195.

an even more extravagant 7-day celebration for the citizens of Susa.[53] She explains that the king is "Drunk with wine and out of toys to display, [so] the king decided to go for the shock-and-awe factor. He summoned Queen Vashti to appear at the party immediately, adorned, as some would suggest, with only her royal crown."[54] Sampson is establishing the idea that the king, who has the highest authority in the royal provinces, is inebriated and has run out of items that show off his wealth. As a plan B, he requests that his wife come wearing only her royal crown. This type of display would flaunt his wealth, his power, and the seductiveness of the one who sexually pleases him. Having Queen Vashti stand naked, and more than likely dance as entertainment for the king and all of his inebriated male guests, would represent his wealth because the queen is his most prized possession and only the king can afford to place such a regal crown upon his wife's head. Displaying Queen Vashti would represent the King's power because it would show: 1) that the king does not have to make a request in person to get what he wants, he can send his eunuchs to deliver a message for him; and 2) that even the most powerful woman in the province submits to the orders of her king, no matter the request. The nakedness of Queen Vashti dancing as entertainment would make the other men jealous as well as exploit her seductive qualities while revealing the contours and voluptuousness of her body. Therefore, to refuse the king's command would disrespect the king's wealth, power, and need to make others envious of his possessions.

Sampson notes that Queen Vashti's response is usually overlooked; "Yet to gloss over this monumental moment of liberation is to miss the making of a model of

[53] Sampson, 28.

[54] Ibid.

leadership in which following 'the sound of the genuine' within one's self is paramount. She explains to her audience, "The text reads, 'But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command conveyed by the eunuchs. At this the king was enraged and his anger burned within him.'"[55] Such a model moves us from the sin of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation to the virtues of self-acceptance and self-development."[56] Here, Samson hints at her three main points, which she paraphrases and alludes to throughout the sermon. She claims, Vashti's metaphorical response of "Hell no!" became a "model for all the women in Susa;" a threat to all of the men; and a reminder that we will sometimes have to pay a price to retrieve our voice, dignity, and self-worth—for the queen, the cost was banishment.[57] As Sampson unfolds the meaning of Queen Vashti's refusal and what it means to us, each revelation corresponds to one of the points she has just made. First, Sampson argues that "Vashti's insistence on taking care of herself reveals to us that we too will be faced with life-altering decisions when we decide to honor our own divinity."[58] The correlation between what Sampson says here and what Sampson said above in terms of the price Queen Vashti had to pay reiterates that we too may have to pay the price of banishment in order to retrieve our voice, dignity and self-worth. Second, she contends that "Vashti's actions and the king's response are telltale signs that we too, will have to choose between revolution and apathy, between objectification and humanization, and between the inevitability of pain and the option of misery."[59] This

[55] Ibid., See also; Esther 1:12, NRSV.

[56] Sampson, 28.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., 28-29.

statement corresponds to the fact that women are a threat because we have the power to choose between submitting to hegemonic powers, and starting our own revolution that honors self. Third, she maintains, "We will all one day be summoned to the king and be forced to choose between a mealy-mouthed yes and an emphatic 'Hell no!'"[60] Redemptive self-love will always choose the emphatic "Hell no!" over the "mealy-mouthed yes" because this woman loves herself so much, she refuses to be oppressed by other people. This serves as a model for how women are to respond when the king, or even their own husband, summons them to fulfill a debasing request. All of these behavioral revelations are reiterated once again in Sampson's "three points to ponder."[61]

Sampson eventually arrives at the point in her sermon where she clearly identifies, through the use of signposts, the three main points that she wants her audience to understand and ponder: "First, we must beware of the invitations we entertain;" "Second, we must beware of the pride of the powerful;" "Third, we need to beware of false thrills; outward success is not equal to inner worth."[62] As she expounds on her first point, she warns women against "fall[ing] victim to a false sense of promotion that stems from our need to be recognized."[63] In a patriarchal society, men possess the power and are recognized as the authority figures. Therefore, to receive an invitation from a male authority figure does present an opportunity for recognition, but the type of recognition is not always a positive one. Sampson states, "Every invitation is not worth accepting and should be scrutinized thoroughly, or we too will be put in the position of appearing naked

[60] Ibid., 29.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

before the king's court."[64] Once again, this first point corresponds to Queen Vashti's metaphorical "Hell no!" serving as a model for all the women of Susa because it warns women how to respond when they are summoned.

The second point to ponder, "[W]e must beware of the pride of the powerful" also serves as a model for women, but more closely represents the notion that women are a threat to men.[65] Sampson explains that the king's pride was fueled by his perceived powerlessness of Queen Vashti.[66] She then takes us back to the song, "Hell No!" in the musical, *The Color Purple*, to point out, "When we respond to our voice, we threaten the pride of the powerful. We must learn how to fight back in ways that annihilate both the pride and the power of those who seek to enslave our bodies, minds, and souls."[67] Here, Sampson cautions women because she does not want the pride of the powerful to "thwart our inner ability to say, 'Hell no!'" instead, she wants us to creatively figure out ways to destroy the pride and the power of those who seek to oppress us. By emphatically saying "Hell no!" or using other emphatic oral expressions, we not only threaten the pride of the powerful, we threaten their power as well.

The third point to ponder, "[W]e need to beware of false thrills; outward success is not equal to inner worth" corresponds to the price we pay to retrieve our voice, dignity, and self-worth.[68] When one is groomed to become the queen, one exudes the appearance of outward success, but once being chosen to be the queen, one is expected to submit to

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

the king's every whim. Consequently, one becomes at risk of losing her inner self. Sampson cites Carol Lakey Hess in saying, ". . . had the queen disregarded her own feelings and submitted to the will of the king, she would have lost herself ever so quietly. . . . No one would have noticed; she would have simply colluded with quiet conspiracy."[69] I think the "quiet conspiracy" is a plot to, in the words of Sampson, "keep us beholden to weak-willed, fickle, and self-centered people."[70] This type of enslavement would inevitably seek to destroy our inner selves. Sampson finally proclaims, "The moral to Vashti's refusal is simple—outward success is not equal to inner worth. Material gain, position, and status are never worth giving one's soul away."[71]

After establishing the central idea of the sermon, Sampson moves her audience to a discussion about a particular scene in the movie, *The Color Purple*. By now, we have already transitioned from the song, "Hell No!" in the musical, *The Color Purple*, to a personal narrative/anecdote, to the biblical text, back to the musical, back to the biblical text, and now to the Steven Spielberg film, *The Color Purple*. Sampson highlights the scene where "Miss Millie, the mayor's wife, asks Sofia if she wants to come and be her maid. Sofia's response is classic: 'Hell no!' Astonished at her response, the mayor asks, 'What did you say, gal?' Sofia responds again, 'Hell no!'"[72] Unlike Queen Vashti's situation, Sofia ends up in a physical altercation and eventually gets sentenced to prison for many years. Upon her release, she is forced to do that which she so adamantly

[69] Ibid., 30.

[70] Ibid., 29.

[71] Ibid., 30.

[72] Ibid.

refused to do earlier—she has to go work for Miss Millie. Sampson points out that it is at the dinner table with her family that Sofia "reclaims her muted voice, recounts the reason for her response, and celebrates the sound of her own voice—the sound of the genuine."[73]

Sampson then shifts her audience to the last paragraph of her sermon by unveiling the profound question that the stories of Sofia, Queen Vashti, and all the women who gather around Nez's table reveal. She asks, "When is the last time you said, 'Hell no!'?" and then proceeds to list how several prominent African American women were able to acknowledge the sound of their own voices—the sound of the genuine.[74] She mentions Esther for the second time. Next, we hear about Fannie Lou Hamer, then Maya Angelou, followed by Sister Shange and Anna Julia Cooper. She says:

> Esther resolved, "If I perish let me perish." Fannie Lou Hamer proclaimed, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired. Our great elder Maya Angelou penned, "And Still I Rise." Sister Shange shouted, "I found God in myself and I loved her/I loved her fiercely." Anna Julia Cooper said soundly, "When and where I enter, the whole race enters with me." God rejoices when we acknowledge the sound of our own voices. It is when we find our voices that we celebrate who God created us to be.[75]

In all five of the above examples that are given about these women, we never hear one of them utter the words, "Hell no!" We understand that they reclaimed their voice and are able to celebrate who God has called them to be, but we do not hear the words that Sampson has trained us to say. On the surface, it does not appear as if the above examples of Esther, Hamer, Angelou, Shange, and Cooper represent "Hell no!" moments.

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

But, once we dig deeper, or at least listen a little closer, we come to the understanding that our "Hell no!" moments represent the times when we "go for the shock-and-awe value and retrieve our voice, our power, and our bodies."[76] Sampson explains, "These women paid high prices for freeing themselves from male authority, patriarchal dominance, and humiliating roles. Yet their responses suggest that more times than not we need to say, "Hell no!" Sometimes, a simple answer of "No," "No thank you," or "I'm sorry, I'll pass" just doesn't get it. We need to go for the shock-and-awe value. . . ."[77]

In this sermon, Sampson has embodied the role of Nez to encourage all of us to go ahead and say the words, "Hell no!" when we find ourselves in a "Hell no!" moment. Consequently, she leaves us with the question, "What will you do when the king/queen comes for you?"[78] Her choice of words "king/queen" invites the men along with the women to come to terms with how they will respond when they are summonsed—will they give a simple response or will they go for the shock-and-awe value by matching their actions and decisions with an emphatic "Hell no!"? Sampson's unconventional approach to the text allows her to re-envision Queen Vashti in a manner that takes away the shame, disgrace, dishonor, and condemnation that society has placed upon this queen. She transforms society's image of Queen Vashti, the villain, into an image of Queen Vashti, the heroine.

*The Womanist Characteristics*

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

Sampson, herself, has wrestled with putting her understanding of womanist preaching into words. She claims that she received clarity on how she was personally defining womanist preaching through a conversation with Katie Cannon.[79] She indicated, "Dr. Cannon says that what [she] is saying is that it [womanist preaching] really is an embodied mediated knowledge."[80] Sampson suggests that "womanist preaching is about the hermeneutic and the delivery, but it is not necessarily a performance like a performing artist performance more than it is saying when one puts one's entire self into something, when one connects with something."[81] This definition reflects Sampson's embodiment of Nez throughout the sermon. Her "embodied mediated knowledge" was the knowledge of her grandmother. She took on the role of her grandmother to help others come to an acknowledgement of the reverence for self—redemptive self-love. For Sampson, redemptive self-love is about "redeeming ourselves from who society has seen us as, redeeming ourselves from what we even see ourselves as to the point that we love ourselves unashamedly without apology."[82]

The most profound characteristic of womanist preaching is found in the audacity to say, "Hell no!" when we find ourselves in a "Hell no!" moment; which symbolizes an absolute reverence for self regardless of the cost or price one might have to pay for keeping their voice, dignity, and self-worth. The redemptive self-love quality of saying, "Hell no!" means going for the shock-and-awe factor to boldly stand in contradiction to stereotypes and what people say when oppressive forces of society seek to silence our

[79] Melva Sampson, phone interview by Kimberly Johnson, March 5, 2010.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

voice. Or, as Shani Settles helps us to understand, it gives us the ability to reconstitute or construct self-identity by deconstructing Eurocentric patriarchal codes and structures.[83] We see this type of "righteous indignation" laced throughout the sermon. We see it in the song "Hell No!" from the musical, *The Color Purple*. We see it in Nez and in all the women who gathered around Nez's kitchen table "reclaiming, reviving, and revolutionizing black women's roles in church and society."[84] We understand the real life application of it in Sampson's womanist dialogue that testifies about the times when her grandmother, her mother, and she herself have had to emphatically refuse what was being asked of them. She says:

> When [big momma] was asked if she would "honor and obey" her husband during one of her three wedding ceremonies, my big momma Nez, said, "Hell no!" When the pastor summoned my mother to ask her to consider staying with my father, even though he was physically and verbally abusive, my mother responded with a resounding, "Hell no!" When asked "if I would preach from the floor because the pulpit was reserved for male authority, I looked the deacon square in the eye and vehemently replied, "Hell no!"[85]

A number of us women stand in agreement with the emphatic "Hell no!" of big momma, Sampson's mother, and Sampson. For instance, a lot of us take issue with the "obey" part of the "honor and obey" clause in wedding ceremonies. Thinking about it even now takes me back to the "Hell No!" lyrics when Sofia sings, "Sick 'n tired how a woman still live like a slave."[86] Had Nez agreed to always obey her husband and submit to patriarchy, it would have put her back into the same role as her ancestors—she would have felt like a slave. Apparently, Nez loved herself enough to say, "Hell no!" Then,

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[83] Settles, 195, 201.

[84] Sampson, 27.

[85] Ibid., 27-28.

[86] Ibid. 27.

when we examine the situation of Sampson's mother, we see that a clergy person who has studied the Bible is asking her to submit to a life of physical and verbal abuse. The mother rightfully loved herself more than she loved her husband and was unwilling to submit to this type of male dominance, which meant a life filled with domestic violence. This internal love for self is what gave her the courage to say, "Hell no!" and walk away. Finally, when we look at the religious hypocrisy surrounding Sampson's experience, we see another authority figure of the church asking a woman to submit to religious patriarchy. The expectation was that Sampson would preach from the floor because the church believed that the sacredness of the pulpit was reserved for male preachers, not female preachers. It does not matter that the same God who calls men to preach is the same God who calls women to preach. Nor does it seem to matter that this particular church called Sampson to preach via an invitation. This church was set in its ways and wanted Sampson to submit to its authority. But, just like her mother and grandmother, Sampson loved herself enough and respected the calling that God placed on her life to the point where she would not allow herself to submit to religious patriarchy, nor would she allow the church to degrade her anointing as a minister. Therefore, with righteous indignation, she too said, "Hell no!"

If we examine Sampson's anecdote that places Nez within the biblical text, we grow to understand that redemptive self-love is a knowledge that needs to be passed on to all generations. Sampson says, "When I read Vashti's story, I think of Nez, who, if she had been with Vashti after hearing the king's request, surely would have looked at the queen and given her the royal nod to repeat after her and say, "Hell no!"[87] Nez would

[87] Ibid., 28.

have encouraged Queen Vashti to say with righteous indignation, "Hell no!" to the king's request. She would have gotten the queen to go for the shock-and-awe factor. Instead, what we are left with is a metaphorical "Hell no!" The queen's refusal definitely got her point across and the price she paid was complete exile. But, the point that both Nez and Sampson seem to be communicating is that when a person tries to shock us with an outrageous request that silences us and dishonors who we are we need to fight back with the "shock-and-awe value and retrieve our voice, our power, and our bodies."[88] Not only does this sermon re-envision Queen Vashti as a heroine who loved herself *regardless*—despite what other people said, thought, or tried to do to her—it encourages us to match our actions and decisions with a forceful verbal response.

Although the sermon is mainly about a woman and uses examples of several women, it can still be considered an inclusive sermon. The target audience appears to consist of women, but the overall message, "Material gain, position, and status are never worth giving one's soul away," is so universal that the message becomes applicable to everyone. At the end of the sermon, Sampson asks, "What will you do when the king/queen comes for you?"[89] This "king/queen" signifies that she is directing the question to both women and men, and that all of us will one day have to choose between honoring our own divinity and honoring some humiliating request. Are we going to be courageous and audacious enough to say, "Hell no!" or are we going to opt for a more simple reply that shies away from countering a shocking request with a shocking response?

[88] Ibid., 30.

[89] Ibid.

## Conclusion: A Comparison and Contrast of Rhetorical Strategies between Redemptive Self-Love & Radical Subjectivity

The two major rhetorical similarities between the two types of sermons—the redemptive self-love sermon by Melva Sampson and the radical subjectivity sermons by Elaine Flake and Gina Stewart—are that they name the oppression and they focus on self-love. Interestingly enough, their similarities also highlight their differences. Sampson names objectification and patriarchal dominance as the oppressive forces that Queen Vashti would have to decide if she was going to submit to. Flake and Stewart identify domestic violence and our male dominated social structures as the oppressive forces that women fall victim to that destroy their self-esteem. The difference between the oppression in a redemptive self-love sermon is that the oppression never comes to full fruition because the woman (i.e. Queen Vashti) adamantly refuses to submit to the request. This means that radical subjectivity sermons empower a woman to physically respond to her situation and redemptive self-love sermons empower a woman to match a verbal response to the decisions and actions she has already made. As I stated above, radical subjectivity sermons lend themselves toward moving the audience/self from victim to victor; however, redemptive self-love sermons lend themselves toward re-envisioning the audience's perception of a biblical character, a historical figure, or a more contemporary person from villain to heroine—one who has a "revolutionary love" for self.[90] These sermons restore the positive viewpoint of how society sees the person. Redemptive self-love sermons redeem the individual.[91] The more conventional way of preaching the Esther text vilifies Queen Vashti and exalts Queen Esther. Yet, Sampson's

[90] Settles, 198.

[91] Stacey Floyd-Thomas, phone interview by Kimberly P. Johnson, February 15, 2010.

sermon takes the stain of shame off Queen Vashti and clothes her in a robe of heroism. Queen Vashti becomes a model for all people to consider when they have to make a life-changing decision.

Both radical subjectivity and redemptive self-love sermons focus on self-love, but they approach it from two different perspectives. Radical subjectivity sermons have to build up and affirm the individual because the woman is not secure in herself, she is on a journey toward identity formation, self-love, and self-worth. Therefore, radical subjectivity sermons focus on getting the woman to love herself enough to change her situation. Redemptive self-love sermons focus on self-love, but they are lifting up the fact that the biblical character already loves herself enough to resist being silenced or losing her dignity or self-worth. Consequently, redemptive self-love sermons work at trying to get the woman to boldly match her actions and strategies with an equally as bold verbal response. In other words, the woman/character in redemptive self-love sermons has already exerted her own agency—she has already devised a plan to stand up for herself and taken the necessary actions. Redemptive self-love sermons, unlike radical subjectivity sermons, do not have to work on getting a woman to defend herself; they have to work at taking the socially perceived shame away from her actions. To further expound, radical subjectivity works at alleviating the shame a woman feels from being victimized. Redemptive self-love works at transforming the eyesight of society because it redeems the perception of a woman that society sees as shameful. A woman in a radical subjectivity sermon has to come to the understanding of self-love and self-worth, but a woman in a redemptive self-love sermon already loves herself *regardless*.

In the next chapter, I examine the rhetorical strategies that a womanist preacher employs when she moves beyond changing society's perception of a person to actually critiquing the culture and changing society's normative view of oppression.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

> *The epistemological privilege of Black women borne of their totalistic experience with the forces of interlocking systems of oppression and strategic options they devised to undermine them.*[1]

This chapter examines both the meaning of critical engagement, the term Stacey Floyd-Thomas uses to describe the fourth tenet of womanism, and the application of it in a sermon. First, I will begin by explaining how Stacey Floyd-Thomas defines this term, how her colleagues define this term, followed by how Alice Walker originally defined this fourth tenet of womanism. Second, I will offer a close reading of a sermon that was delivered by a womanist preacher who illuminates the meaning of critical engagement. Claudette Copeland's sermon, "What Shall We Do For Our Sister?" based on two scriptures, Song of Solomon 8:8 and Romans 15:30, challenges us to rethink our one-dimensional assessment of who is affected by certain forms of oppression and prompts us to realize our interconnectedness to each other. And third, following the sermon analysis, this chapter will juxtapose Copeland's sermon with key rhetorical strategies Kirk-Duggan's sermon to uncover the rhetorical similarities and to discover the difference between critical engagement and traditional communalism since the two maintain a communal perspective.

*Defining Critical Engagement*

According to Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Critical Engagement emphasizes "the necessity for womanist thought to remain on the cutting edge of approaches to and

[1] Floyd-Thomas, 208.

discourses on religion and society."[2] I understand critical engagement as a cultural critique of society's cultural norms. In other words, any person using this particular critical lens is apt to analyze, classify, and/or evaluate all aspects of culture—including, but not limited to religion, politics, visual arts, architecture, literature, the media, and technology. I believe that a womanist who utilizes critical engagement does so for the sake of correcting society's normative view of 'oppression'. Floyd-Thomas further explains it as "a hermeneutical suspicion, cognitive counterbalance, intellectual indictment, and perspectival corrective to those people, ideologies, movements, and institutions that hold a one-dimensional analysis of oppression; an unshakable belief that Black women's survival strategies must entail more than what others have provided as an alternative."[3] Critical engagement confronts what society sees as normative by asking the critical questions that challenge those norms. Central to this notion of challenging existing norms is the tension of "what ought to be the meaning and identity politics of womanism itself in the normative field of religious studies, extending especially to the politics of white feminism and Black [male] theological thought in the United States and globally."[4]

Melanie L. Harris addresses the tension behind the religious identity politics of womanism and argues for religious pluralism. She challenges the exclusivity of womanism's Christian identity by introducing womanist humanism as a "new hermeneutic designed to move womanist theology into position to face these critiques [of

[2] Ibid., 10.

[3] Ibid., 208.

[4] Ibid., 10.

not incorporating Alice Walker's pagan identity along with the religious experiences of others outside of Christianity into womanist theology] and accept the challenge of religious plurality."[5] Harris claims that womanist scholarship has overlooked Walker's pagan identity, which means that womanist theology has silenced the religious and ethical voice of the woman who coined the term, *womanist*. To date, there is limited research that considers both Walker's religious and ethical perspectives, which is why Harris proposes a womanist humanism.[6] Womanist humanism is derived from womanism and black humanism. According to Harris:

> [A] womanist theological approach, centers on the theological reflections and ethical worldviews of black women that are shaped by their experiences of—and resistance to—racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism. It uses race, class, and gender analysis to frame a lens through which these issues and other interrelated oppressions are examined in order to develop strategies and theologies of resistance and survival.[7]

Likewise, a black humanist "nitty-gritty hermeneutic," a term that Harris borrows from Anthony B. Pinn,

> [A]sserts human worth, agency, and responsibility, and envisions these themes as a part of the process toward black liberation. . . . this hermeneutic centers on "problems of life" and existential questions about the meaning and dehumanization of black life and objectification of black bodies. The promotion of justice, the eradication of evil, the existence of God, and theodicy are other "problems of life" that a black humanist "nitty-gritty hermeneutic" attempts to address.[8]

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[5] Melanie L. Harris, "Womanist Humanism: A New Hermeneutic," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 212.

[6] Ibid., 211.

[7] Ibid., 212.

[8] Ibid., 213.

The humanist aspect of womanist humanism helps womanist theology become more critical of its own religious categories and grow to be religiously inclusive. The womanist component pushes black humanism "to incorporate race, class, and gender analysis of black women's experiences and examine how these and other interrelated oppressions impact black women's theological and religious reflections."[9]

M. Shawn Copeland[10] argues that black women have been pushed to the margin and as a result, "black women have learned to think on the margins, to think clearly and quickly before the blunt force of *ersatz*-reality. . . . Black women intellectuals . . . have [learned] to apprehend, and appropriate their own subjectivity in search of truth."[11] The phrase M. Shawn Copeland uses to describe the type of "serious thinking" that black women who situated on the margins engage in is called, *critical cognitive praxis*. She says:

> The phrase cognitive praxis denotes the dynamic activity of knowing: questioning patterns and the sometimes jagged-edge of experience (including biological, psychological, social, religious, cultural, aesthetic); testing and probing possible answers; marshaling evidence and weighing it against cultural codes and signs, against imperious and subjugated truths; risking judgment; taking up the struggle. Such knowledge roots its accountability, its authoritative control of meaning and value in the cognitive, moral, and religious authenticity of the identity of poor, excluded, and despised black women. [12]

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[9] Ibid.

[10] I will distinguish M. Shawn Copeland from Claudette Copeland by referring to her by her full name from this point forward.

[11] M. Shawn Copeland, "A Thinking Margin: The Womanist Movement as Critical Cognitive Praxis," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 227.

[12] Ibid. See also Bernard Lonergan, "Cognitional Structure," in *Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1967), 221-239.

According to M. Shawn Copeland, this type of praxis yields a philosophical, theoretical, and concrete embodied relatedness to truth.[13] She also explains, "The term critical in womanist cognitive praxis refers to its intention to carry out a radical critique of what is. This critique encompasses both intellectual and practical aims, disrupts all habitual affirmation of the status quo, distinguishes appearance from reality, and exposes the roots of what is."[14] M. Shawn Copeland claims, "When black women critically inquire, probe, reflect, judge, decide, challenge, and act in service of truth, they constitute themselves as critical knowers (and doers)."[15] For her, a womanist cognitive praxis, or as Floyd-Thomas calls it *critical engagement*, gives emphasis to the dialectic between oppression, a reflection on one's experience of that oppression, and a call to action that resists or eliminates the oppression.[16] Not only do their experiences become the texts, but their vary bodies can become the rhetorical artifact as well.

In the article, "The Womanist Dancing Mind: Speaking to the Expansiveness of Womanist Discourse," Emilie M. Townes argues that the womanist dancing mind has the enormous intracommunal task of trying to understand the assortments of African American life.[17] She says:

> [I]t is in the dancing mind that we can meet diversities—cultural, racial, ethnic, class, gendered, national, age, and religious. As we allow our mind and our scholarship to dance, we can come to welcome the unknown rather than rush to

[13] M. Shawn Copeland, 227.

[14] Ibid., 228.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 229.

[17] Emilie M. Townes, "The Womanist Dancing Mind: Speaking to the Expansiveness of Womanist Discourse," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 237.

> name it, control it, and dominate it. This openness allows the richness of religious life and thought beyond what we know and do not know to fill our scholarship with deeper meaning, more piercing analysis, and more trenchant critique.[18]

Townes points out the fact that "Black women's experiences have been left out of the theoretical and material constructs of both Black and feminist theologies in the United States. She also notes, that the existence of a liberation theology signals that "something or someone is being left out of the 'normative' theo-ethical discourses.[19] She states, "There would be no womanist, mujerista, Asian, or African women's theologies if Christian feminist theology was deep and rigorous in scope."[20] She claims that the womanist dancing mind "is more than our attempt to make sense of the worlds surrounding us—sometimes enveloping us, sometimes smothering us, sometimes holding us, sometimes birthing us. It is more than our desire to reconfigure the world in our own images and then invites others to come and inspect the textures, the colors, the patterns, the shapes, the sizes of this new order, and this new set of promises."[21]

For Townes, it appears that this fourth tenet of womanism, or as Floyd-Thomas calls it critical engagement, "challeng[es] the ways we know (epistemology) and the ways we think (orthodoxy) and the ways we act (orthopraxy). [And then proceeds] to make judgments on these."[22] She talks about the womanist dancing mind as an analytical tool that helps us to uncover the dynamics of oppression. Townes admits, "It is through the particularity of the womanist dancing mind that I can meet and greet those parts of

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[18] Ibid., 245.

[19] Ibid., 246.

[20] Ibid., 240.

[21] Ibid., 237.

[22] Ibid., 247.

myself that have been lost through neglect, ignorance, well-practiced amnesia, or malicious separation."[23] She explains:

> Exploring this particularly means exploring gender—sexuality, sexual orientation, sexism—to get at not only my hope for wholeness, but also to understand the ways in which age and body image, and a history that contains the castrating matriarch, the ultimate mammy, and the lascivious whore continue to ooze from the pores of videos and magazines and television and radio and music and the pulpit.[24]

This type of critical engagement requires an intracultural inspection of African American life in order to uncover and deconstruct the hierarchies and the hegemonies that are both internal and external to African Americans. A womanist dancing mind helps blacks deal with our own internal "isms" so we can come together as a whole people and fight against the external "isms."

Alice Walker refers to this fourth tenet of her womanist definition as, "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender."[25] What does this mean? For some it means that womanism is the darker hue of feminism. Since purple is a deeper shade of lavender, it also means that womanists have some deeper issues/forms of oppression that are unique to its own color/race. While Walker mentions this idea in her first tenet, "A black feminist or feminist of color," she takes the conversation of this fourth tenet in a different direction.[26] In her essay, "Only Justice Can Stop a Curse," she critiques the effects of the white man's crime against humanity and implies what affects one, affects everyone.[27]

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[23] Ibid., 244.

[24] Ibid., 242-243.

[25] Walker, xii.

[26] Ibid., xi.

[27] Ibid., 340-341.

She argues, "Only justice to every living thing (and everything is alive) will save humankind."[28] Similarly, she notes in a different essay, "To the Editors of *Ms. Magazine*," "Every affront to human dignity necessarily affects me as a human being on the planet, because I know every single thing on earth is connected."[29] It is here, she stresses the need for black women to be critical, not silent. Walker says, "In the sixties some black women swerved out of our historical path of challenging everything that looked wrong to us to keep mum while black men 'ran the black nation.' This was physically crippling to a generation of black women (and black people in general) and we say, Never again."[30] She declares that women will never again consent to silent uncritical loyalty. This continual thread of critically examining life runs throughout this fourth tenet. However, it also calls people to action. Walker poses the question, "What can we do?"[31] She urges us as individuals to get involved with saving Earth by talking with family, organizing friends, and educating people about the environmental threats that will inevitably affect humanity.[32] In short, what this fourth tenet tells us is that we need a global mindset; we must be critical in our thinking and brave enough to ask the critical questions; we must suggest call to action measures that will help resolve the problems affecting society; and we must then become involved by doing what we can.

**Rhetorical Analysis of Claudette Copeland's sermon,**

[28] Ibid., 342.

[29] Ibid., 353.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 345.

[32] Ibid.

**"What Shall We Do For Our Sister?"**

*"We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?"*

*"Our little sister has no breasts. What shall we do for our little sister when men come along asking for her?"*

*"I urge you sisters by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit to join me in my struggle by praying for me."* This is the Word of the Lord, the people said, thanks be to God.

**Song of Solomon 8:8, KJV, MSG; Romans 15:30, MSG**

Claudette Copeland's sermon, "What Shall We Do For Our Sister?" was delivered October 7, 2007, at Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church (MBCC), in Memphis, Tennessee, for their Breast Cancer Awareness Service.[33] The predominantly African American church, which seats just under three-thousand people, was filled to capacity for its ten o'clock Sunday morning service. Most of those in attendance were people who regularly attend church, but due to the marketing of this event; it is possible that some might have gone to hear Copeland preach and give her testimony about being a breast cancer survivor while some might have gone to hear the musical guest gospel recording artist, Kurt Karr. However, a number might have gone to hear both.

Copeland, like many preachers, reuses her material, but she says, this was the first time that she preached this sermon with this content.[34] She thinks of herself a stew chef who is able to pull together the right ingredients in order to make a good meal.[35] Likewise, she is able to pull narratives, anecdotes, imagery, metaphors, and exegetical

[33] This sermon was not published, but I personally attended the service, so I have included a transcript of the sermon in Appendix B. A complete DVD of the sermon is available at Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church, Memphis, Tennessee.

[34] Claudette Copeland, phone interview by Kimberly P. Johnson, March 16, 2010.

[35] Ibid.

work from the archives of her forty years of preaching. For example, the part of her sermon that begins the discussion about breast is taken from chapter three of her book, *Stories From Inner Space: Confessions of A Preacher Woman and Other Tales*.[36]

When asked, "What kind of difficulties or challenges do you experience in trying to make sure that your sermons reflect a womanist message?" Copeland admits, "I am fundamentally cut from a traditional Pentecostal mold—however that is interpreted. And the brand of traditional Pentecostalism from which I spring, there are certain things that are ingrained in my visceral way of worshipping and doing God. I think that is the thing that I continually have to step outside of, to reflect on, and to self-correct."[37] For her, the real challenge in preaching and forming sermons is that she must step out of what has been very comfortable and very nurturing for her.[38] It is in her attempt to model womanist concepts that she is able to step out of her traditional Pentecostal mold. Only through a close reading of her sermon will we be able to determine if she was successful or not.

*Analysis*

"What Shall We Do For Our Sister?" is another racy sermon that challenges the ways in which we view other people's struggles and even challenges our own response to those struggles. The sermon divulges a number of experiences that Copeland encountered while fighting breast cancer. She incorporates plenty of humor in this one hour and eleven minute sermon to help her talk about the delicate subject of breast cancer

[36] Ibid. See also, Claudette Copeland, Stories From Inner Space: Confessions of a Preacher Woman and Other Tales (San Antonio: Red Nail Press, 2003).

[37] Claudette Copeland, phone interview by Kimberly P. Johnson, March 16, 2010.

[38] Ibid.

and to assist her in relating to her audience. It is the longest out of all five sermons considered in this dissertation and it is packed with the most testimonies, personal narratives, anecdotes, and humor. Even prior to entering the pulpit, Copeland knew that her sermon would be lengthy, so she jokingly warned her audience before reading the scripture. She said, "Just kinda nudge your girlfriend, nudge the one next to you and just tell them, "We gonna be here a minute" [Laughing].[39] Everyone laughed, but she was right, we were there for a nice while holding onto every word she said.

Copeland's preliminary sermonic moment begins with her prophetic singing. We usually see this in worship service when people yield themselves to the power of the Holy Spirit and sing words that the Spirit has placed on their heart. She sets up this moment of prophetic worship by saying to audience, "Come on and clap your hands in this place if God has changed anything for you [Clapping]. I said, clap your hands if God has changed anything for you [Clapping]."[40] This is the point at which she begins to sing her words. As she sings, she testifies that God has changed her and made her stronger than what she was previously. Copeland's prophetic singing acts as a sermonic teaser, quite like a television teaser or preview that shows a highlight of what is to come in order to attract the audience's attention. She tells us that "The devil thought he had me. He never thought I'd win. I know what ya'll heard about me; but, I'm stronger than I've ever, ever been."[41] She already knows that most of us are aware of her battle with

[39] Claudette Copeland, "What Shall We Do For Our Sister?" October 7, 2007, Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church, Memphis, TN (transcribed by Kimberly P. Johnson, see Appendix B).

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

cancer, so to say that she has changed, she is stronger, and she had the victory over Satan, piques the curiosity of the audience.

Copeland incorporates a second teaser by commenting on the musical performance of the guest artist, Kurt Karr. She jokingly says, "Glory be to God forever. Kurt Karr is a terrorist [Laughing]! The F.B.I. is outside now. They will be waiting to take you into custody."[42] While her comment claims that Karr's singing was so good, he terrorized the audience with his musical brilliance; it also implies that he has become a terrorist to Satan. I argue that this is Copeland's second teaser because it connects to a point that she later makes about people who pray becoming "Satan's greatest terror!"[43] Already, she is using her testimony as well as her comment about Karr's performance as windows into her sermon.

After the terrorist comment, we hear a formulaic introduction where the preacher greets the pastor, clergy, church people, and family members who came in support; which leads us into the sermon. The actual sermon begins with the reading of both scriptures, Song of Solomon 8:8 in two versions: the King James Version, "*We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?"* as well as The Message Bible, "*Our little sister has no breast. What shall we do with our little sister when men come along asking for her?"* and Romans 15:30 in the New International Version, *I urge you sisters, by our Lord, Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me;*" then, the posed question/title of the sermon; followed by an anecdote of the Rat Trap in the Farmhouse.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

The placement of this anecdote is rather abrupt because we go from realizing that "Our little sister has no breasts" to hearing about a rat trap. However, Copeland's use of this anecdote is masterful because she describes a story that everyone can understand in order to demonstrate how what affects one really affects everyone. She says, "the moral of the story is: next time a rat tells you there's a rat trap in the farm house, you better understand that it affects the whole farm."[44] In the case of this sermon, the rat trap represents breast cancer, so she is really making the argument that breast cancer affects everyone, not just the one who has the disease. Her point is quite similar to the implied argument that we heard in the traditional communalism sermon—what affects one, affects everyone. Copeland's anecdote allows her audience to see what happens when we choose not to get involved in each other's struggles and she helps her audience envision what happens when we all choose to join in the struggle together as a community.

Like the rat who warns the farm animals, Copeland warns her audience, "there's a rat trap [Clapping] in the farmhouse that affects all of us."[45] The rat trap she is talking about is called "breast cancer." She proceeds by identifying the ratio of people who will never be affected by breast cancer coupled with vivid descriptions of the discovery process. Her imagery allows the audience to vicariously experience what Copeland went through from the point when she found out that she had breast cancer to the point of her mastectomy. She says:

> Seven out of eight of you will never have to lay down on a surgical table and feel like you are laying down in your chiffon only to come up from the surgical sleep altered forever. Seven out of eight of you will never have to search the face of

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

> your partner to find a comfort you cannot provide yourself—to hope your wounds will be kissed and caressed.[46]

Copeland's use of imagery is to invoke a vicarious experience and to invoke passion in the hearts of those seven out eight people who will never personally battle against breast cancer. She has to invoke the passion in the beginning of her sermon because she calls them to a form of action at the end of her sermon. She notes, for most people, conversations about breast cancer and bodily affliction are just that—conversations where "you nod politely and you feel some intellectual curiosity and down in your being you say, 'Well thank God it ain't none of me!'"[47] Therefore, she has to strategically take her audience on a vicarious journey of what it is like to be forced to deal with breast cancer. So, she takes the time to satisfy their "intellectual curiosity" because if their curiosity is met, they will be more prone to sympathize with and walk alongside the next person who tells them that she/he has breast cancer.

Copeland recognizes that a sermon about breasts can be a touchy subject matter for a Sunday morning worship service, so she immediately confronts resistance with the use of pastoral authority and moral authority, which ultimately heightens her credibility. In an effort to calm the anxiety she subtly informs her audience that she has been invited by the pastor and women of the church to speak on this subject matter. Then, she explains, "If God can speak through a donkey[48] [Laughing], if God can, c'mmon here God's gonna talk to you this morning through a breast [Laughing]. Touch your friend and

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] See Numbers 22:28.

say, 'Relax.'"[49] She uses the pastoral authority of the church pastor and the moral authority of God to endorse the content of her sermon, which makes it extremely difficult for anyone to refute that she has the right to preach about breasts in a Sunday morning worship service.

Copeland shifts from preparing her audience for the conversation about breast to descriptively depicting the physicality, excitement, adoration, nicknames, and usage of our breasts. Here, she uses multiple metaphors to portray the physicality of women's breasts. She describes them as "a complex landscape of fifteen-to-twenty lobes within each one. Milk-holding receptacles exiting at a nipple—breasts. Highway system of complex ducts and thoroughfares—breasts. Struma, called fatty tissue and ligaments. Pectoral muscles, a waterway of lymphatic fluid—breasts" in order to show that they are "a miracle of creation."[50] Then, she reprimands her audience members who are sitting quietly as if they are mortified by the subject matter. Copeland says, "Don't you dare sit here this morning and act like you're embarrassed by the conversation because if I look at most of you closely, periodically, you try to show yours [Shouting, Laughing & Clapping]. And, for those of you who have nothing to show, I don't mean no harm, but the others of ya'll trying to sneak-a-peak [Laughing & Clapping]."[51] Here, she points out their hypocrisy by identifying the type of uncanny behavior they engage in during worship service. If they are already trying to show their breasts or "sneak-a-peak," then there is no legitimate reason for the audience to act like they are embarrassed about the

[49] Appendix B.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

topic. This tactic of leveling the listening field puts all of her listeners at ease and they are able to finally relax enough to "go with [her] for a minute" as she preaches and tells her own story.[52]

Once the audience becomes relaxed enough to laugh again, Copeland reminisces on the excitement that little girls have as they await the arrival of their breasts and compare cup sizes. She even captures the dialogue that teenagers have when they ask, "What size you wear?"[53] She describes the adoration that young women have for their breasts and then contrasts that with how burdensome older women find them by saying, "Breasts, as young women, we display them like flags flown proudly in the wind. As older women, we kick them like burdens [Laughter & Clapping] scraping the ground [Laughter]. Breasts, oh come on you can laugh!"[54] Next, she describes the common vernacular terms: "jugs, watermelons, mosquito bites [Laughter], titties [Laughter], boobs;" and how we use our breasts.[55] She claims, "They are the intersection between the maternal and the erotic. They comfort our babies of any age [Laughter & Clapping]."[56] Shortly after she said this, an audience member yelled, "Preach Claudette!" Strategically, Copeland describes breast from a physiological standpoint all the way to a maternal/erotic standpoint. She helps her audience to become comfortable with the subject matter and to understand the "lifelong friendly companionship" that

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

develops with breasts so they will realize the type of devastation women feel when we "find out that our breast are out to kill us."[57]

After describing the intricacies of how one develops a friendly companionship with breast and then mentioning how that relationship can go bad, Copeland directs her attention to her first text, Song of Solomon 8:8. She explains to her audience that the Song of Solomon "is a celebration of married love. It is an allegory of praise between a man and a maiden. . . . It extols the beauty of sensual love and the wonders of the human body."[58] Without delay, she uses a reversal to shift the focus toward the negative side of being in love so she can talk about how the wounds the flesh wound the soul. She says:

> It is often said that "The greatest wounds are the wounds of the heart, the wounds of the emotions." But any woman who has undergone physical wounding, any woman that has undergone the wounds of the flesh . . . If you have ever been physically abused; if you've ever been slapped or hit; if you've ever been punched or had your hair pulled; if you've ever been kicked; if you've ever raped or sexually violated; if you have ever suffered disfigurement in your body—the loss of a body part, the loss of your eyesight, the loss of a limb; then, that person, that woman knows viscerally, that the wounds of the body don't just wound the body, but they inscribe themselves as wounds on the soul.[59]

Remember, Copeland had just established that the Song of Solomon celebrates the beauty of love, so she needed to use the axiom as a transition into what she believes are the greatest wounds—the wounds of the body because "they inscribe themselves as wounds on the soul."[60] She starts off mentioning women, but then, in the middle of what she is saying, she drops the word "women" and substitutes it with the word "you" as an

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

inclusive strategy to allow the women as well as the men to see themselves in the sermon because "then, that person [man], that woman" can viscerally understand how bodily wounds wound the spirit.[61]

Copeland refers to the scripture again, but this time, the audience is beginning to understand who the little sister is and what the question is really asking. She says, "We have a little sister and she has no breasts. What shall be done for our sister? "What shall be done for her when men come to call? What shall be done for those of you who sit outside the conversation of breast cancer, but what shall be done for us?"[62] The little sister is all of us—those with breast cancer and those without; those who are HIV positive, those whose child has been killed by a drive-by shooting, those who have had a heart attack, those suffering with lung problems due to smoking, those who have spouses that decide they do not want to be married anymore, and those who have business partners or friends that betray them.[63] Here, the focus becomes what Townes calls "intracommunal" because Copeland images the struggle of the little sister who has no breasts to symbolically reflect all of our struggles. The little sister represents all of us who have some form of bodily wound that has somehow wounded our spirit. The real question being asked is what shall people do for us that will help our spirit heal when we are wounded ourselves?

Copeland begins to describe her own wounding experience with breast cancer. She tells her audience that she was "at the top of [her] game" at thirty-eight years old,

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.; see also Song of Solomon 8:8, KJV.

[63] Appendix B.

"preaching at all the right doors on all the best platforms" when the doctor informed her that she had "Infiltrating ductal andenocarcinoma, a kind of cancer that arises quickly, spreads quickly, and kills quickly."[64] She then proceeds to ask her litany of questions:

> What shall be done for me? There comes a time when a Mercedes benz don't help [Clapping & Shouting]. . . . What shall be done for our little sister when men come to call? . . . I wasn't cute . . . but I had hair. Come on Survivors! . . . I could swing it like the best of the girls. What shall be done for me when I sit in the bathroom and wipe the last strand of hair off my head? What shall be done when I walk up in church hyper-pigmented looking like a dead woman with my head rag on watching all of the daughters in the church beginning to audition for my job? [Shouting] "Pastor David, how are you, do you need a pie? Do you need somebody to cook for you?" I'm over there sick and dying, but "Pastor David." Parenthetically, letting him know that she still had two breasts [Shouting, Tell the story! Tell the story!]. What shall be done for our little sister?[65]

In all of these examples, Copeland's question is paired with her relationship toward a material object, a bodily part, or other women. First, she lets her audience know that material possessions, such as a Mercedes benz, a diamond, or a Rolex will not help them when they have a disease that kills quickly. Second, she talks about her relationship with her long hair and how it was one of her defining characteristics. Third, she reveals that the medicines made her hair fall out. So, the part of her body that she seemed most proud of was no longer there to give her comfort either. Fourth, she reveals that the daughters of the church were more concerned with becoming Pastor David's next leading lady than they were about helping their own Pastor Copeland. She watched them as they were "Parenthetically, letting him know that [they] still had two breasts [Tell the story! Tell the story!]."[66] Here, a person is yelling, "Tell the story!" probably because it just seems so outrageous that as a co-pastor, Copeland would have to witness all of the daughters of

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

the church trying to go after her husband. The normal expectation is that the daughters would try to assist Copeland, but they did not help either.

Up to this point, Copeland has identified two problems: losing a breast due to breast cancer and having a support system failure. I believe the latter problem is why she repetitively asks, "What shall be done for me?" and "What shall be done for our little sister?"[67] In her effort to call people to some form of action, she shifts the sermon focus toward the second scripture (theme scripture), Romans 15:30, "That I urge you by the Lord, Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, join me in my struggle by praying to God for me!"[68] Copeland uses this second text to answer the question of the first text. She says, "Couple of things I want to leave with you today, I don't know if you're going to be happy or not. But there's a rat trap in the farm house. What shall we do for our little sis? The first thing that I pick up in my experience both in life and in the text, is that if you want to do anything for your little sister, the first thing that we need from you is your partnership."[69] Copeland's first response to the question, "What shall we do for our little sis?" is one of partnership, "Join me, when people are suffering and when they're struggling."[70] She informs them that sick people become invisible and that the church prays for you when you are sick for about three weeks, which implies that that the church stops praying after a while and may even forget that the individual is sick. Then, she

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

reminds her audience, "Cancer is not contagious, you can't catch it."[71] What happens when people are contagious is that others stop going around them. So she is telling her audience that it is okay to go visit and be in the presence of those battling cancer. Next, she shifts back into her testimony, but this time she shares it by thanking God for the men who are not afraid to partner with their woman/wife, who do not run off to the comforts of another woman, and who know how to "hold you 'til it gets better."[72] I refer to this as a testimony because in her words of praise, she is implicitly thanking God for her own husband how courageous he was in partnering with her. Following this moment of praise, Copeland offers concrete examples to help her audience understand exactly how they can partner with her in the struggle against breast cancer, "wear the pink ribbon; give; run; walk; march; do what you've gotta do, but don't leave me out here by myself."[73] This is her first call to action and she compares it to the incarnation of Jesus. She says, "That is the whole story of the incarnation when Jesus did not stand back, but he said, "Look-a-here, prepare me a body and I'll go down and I'll be touched and tempted at all points, just like you! I'll show you how to overcome in a body! Partnership."[74] Her analogy makes the point that Jesus did not leave us out here by ourselves, so we should not leave each other out here by themselves.

Copeland immediately transitions into her second call to action. She explains to her audience, "The second thing that I raise up today has already been said. What can you do for me? Acknowledge that it's a painful struggle and that even though yours may

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

not be like mine, validate me and tell me that you understand what pain is like."[75] Whereas the first remedy sought partnership, the second one seeks acknowledgement, validation, and understanding. Here, Copeland takes her audience back to the scriptures by reminding them of "The text that Paul says, "Join me in my *painful* struggle."[76] She emphasizes "*painful*" because she is asking the audience to acknowledge that the struggle is painful. Her emphasis allows her to critique modern-day Christianity by making the argument that "Modern theology is a painless Christianity [Come on now!]. Modern theology is devoid of a cross, it is absent of a struggle."[77] She is critiquing the myth that Christians do not have to go through a struggle or experience hardships. As she reminds her audience of the cross, which is central to Christianity, she identifies the various environmental, physical, financial, psychological, parental, sexual, and spiritual struggles. Copeland explains:

> Life is marinated in pain. It was Haiti yesterday, Darfur last night, Jena, Louisiana this morning. Every Christian in this society has a struggle. Yours might not be a disease, yours might be that you're broke [Laughing] up in here today looking good on credit [Laughing & Clapping]. Yours might be mental instability. If we catch you one day when you miss your medicine, we'd all be in trouble [Laughing & Clapping]. Somebody say, "painful struggles." Yours might be raising children without resources or respite. Aging parents that you're trying to care for, a loveless marriage. Struggles with sexuality, sexual choices, no sex [Laughing]. Struggles: moral failure and spiritual dryness; breast cancer; chemotherapy; disfigurement; radiation; reconstruction; fear of metastasis. Life for none of us has been no crystal stair [Clapping].[78]

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

Copeland's critical lens widens the reach of her target audience far beyond those who have fought against breast cancer or experienced physical wounds and emotional wounds due to relationships. Here, the struggles move beyond disease and relationships to include environmental disasters, financial insecurity, mental instability, fatigue, being a caregiver, and sexual lifestyle. A sermon that started off talking about breasts and breast cancer has now been able to reach those who might have felt marginalized by the conversation about breasts. By this point, it has become extremely clear that the entire audience—male and female—represents the little girl who has no breasts and that the breasts serve as a metaphor for our own struggles. So, it does not matter the type of struggle we experience, Copeland is telling the audience to join each other in their struggles.

At this point, Copeland revisits the notion that she is stronger than she has ever been, a phrase that we heard from her prophetic song prior to the sermon. She testifies as to how her struggle has made her stronger and helped her to lean on God's Everlasting Arms. According to Copeland, she had to lay down her own arrogance and leave her ego at the altar before she could completely lean on God.[79] She wants God to do a new work in the lives of the people; so she dares them not to run from their struggles and explains that God regenerates us through our struggle by changing us, saving us, and delivering us.[80] Copeland encourages her audience to be thankful for the struggles because struggles keep pushing us. She says, "It pushed you beyond your reach, pushed you beyond, come on here, your lovers [Clapping]. It pushed you beyond the alcohol bottle

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

and pushed you all the way to the cross of Jesus Christ! [Shouting & Clapping]"[81] She acknowledges that pain pushes people to the cross because it forces us to lean on God.

After discussing the need for partnership along with acknowledgement, validation, and understanding, Copeland discloses the third remedy in her plan of action. She says, "The third thing I want to raise up today is prayer. In the midst of all that's going on, Paul says, "Join me in my struggle by your *prayers* to God for me."[82] This ending clause contains the third step, which is prayer. Copeland creates a litany of parallelisms to establish the power of prayer in a manner that will demonstrate how a negative situation is able to transform into a positive situation and how a bad reality gets transformed into a good reality. She explains, "[T]here is a conduit called prayer [Yeah!]. It is the privilege of the believer. It is the sanctuary of the saint. It is the refuge of the righteous. It is the comfort of the Christian, if you will pray."[83] In other words, prayer is a special benefit, a sacred space, a protective covering, and a place where believers find solace.

Copeland tells another personal narrative, but this time she is at a women's conference with "big name evangelists" and amidst people praising her for her books and her ministry, somebody yells out, "Hey Clyde!" which is a name she was known by in high school and college when she did not always do what was right. Then, she tells a story about Jesus calling Simon, Peter's "flesh man, personal man" and not the public persona of Peter.[84] She says,

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

> I heard Jesus say, "Look-a-here Simon, I have prayed for you! When people forget you, when people are embarrassed by your suffering, when people walk a wide circle around you, this is your comfort, Simon! With all of your disfigurements, with all of your failures, with all of your weaknesses," I'm talking to somebody in here today, "with all of your confusion about what is right, I have prayed for you!"[85]

Copeland uses this story to tie back to her first point about partnership. "When people forget you, when people are embarrassed by your suffering" is parallel to the comment "sick folk become invisible."[86] The phrase, about people walking a wide circle around other people is the reason she had to make the statement, "Cancer is not contagious, you can't catch it."[87] Then, she locates the struggles of her audience members in their disfigurements, failures, weaknesses, and confusion to communicate that Jesus has prayed for them, which means that Jesus is partnering with them.

Copeland decides to continue her testimony by telling her audience, "I'm so glad I found Christ before I found cancer! I'm so glad I have an organizing principle in the midst of my life and it is founded upon the prayers of the Great High Priest, who sits at the right hand of the Father praying for me."[88] Here, we see that she has assigned a masculine pronoun to God. However, in all fairness, my initial conversation with Copeland on the day that she preached this sermon is what sparked the research question to this project: Do sermons preached by womanists reflect and or reinforce womanist thought? In that exchange, she told me that "[she] considers [herself] a womanist, but

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[she] doesn't think it comes across clearly in [her] preaching."[89] Her use of a masculine pronoun represents one of those instances where her preaching does not clearly communicate womanist thought. In an interview, Copeland explained that she is "fundamentally cut from a traditional Pentecostal mold" and that she "must self-correct [her] fundamental formation which was very much male nurtured."[90] She says, "The male nurturing has written itself very indelibly in the way [she] sees the church and the way [she] sees God, from a very elementary place."[91] So, she thinks "[her] real challenge, always in preaching and in forming sermons, is the challenge to [herself] that [she] must step out of what has always been very comfortable for [her] and very nurturing to [her]."[92] We see this same instance of assigning a masculine pronoun to God later on in her sermon. Copeland does this three more times when she describes being angry with God and wanting to put her "fists in *his* face. And say to *him*, if this is how you treat your friends, I see why you have so few! . . . [S]ince I've learned how to get in the face of God, thank you Jesus! Woe is me, I'm unclean and undone, but *he* touches the coal to my lips [Clapping], sanctifies me, cleanses me, and refines me."[93]

Immediately following her first masculine pronoun slip, Copeland jumps back into her third call to action—prayer. She says, "Prayer, prayer, prayer, if you want to do something for me, let's join together in prayer cuz first of all, a saint who prays is Satan's

[89] A personal conversation with Claudette Copeland on October 7, 2007 at the Madison Hotel, Memphis, Tennessee.

[90] Claudette Copeland, Phone Interview by Kimberly P. Johnson, March 16, 2010.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Appendix. B.

greatest terror!"[94] Her comment ties back to what she said about Kurt Karr being a "terrorist" prior to preaching this sermon. The reason people should want to be this type of terrorist or "Satan's greatest terror" is because "[Satan] is afraid of saints who will pray!"[95] Copeland explains to her audience, "I need you in my life. This is what I need you to do for me. I need you to have my back in the realm and domain where principalities still want to take my life!"[96] Similar to how we want certain people to have our backs when we get into a brawl or fight, Copeland differentiates between the type of person she wants to have her back. She does not call upon someone who is still saying beginner prayers; she wants someone whose prayers are more advanced. She describes the power of prayer and how prayer makes us "become Satan's greatest nightmare!"[97] She declares:

> For when you pray . . . demons begin to get discombobulated [Shouting & Clapping]. When you have been in the thrown room with God, oh…you can walk in and ain't got to say a word, you just change the atmosphere. . . . [W]hen you pray, you can see some things. Ah… I can discern spirits, I know whether it's an angel or a demon, I know whether it's human or Divine, I know whether it's going to be healing or death. When I pray I can see some things. Not only can I see some things when I pray, but my God, I can stop some things![98]

Copeland wants her audience to realize that prayer gives them power and that prayer is the weapon of choice in the warfare against demons, sickness, and disease.

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[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid.

Continuing in this same notion, Copeland makes her second point about prayer by testifying that "prayer is self's greatest refiner."[99] Here, she tells the funniest personal narrative in the entire sermon. She begins the testimony by confessing her thoughts and actions from the time when she was sick, her body was deteriorating, and she saw the women of the church going after her husband. Copeland admits to her audience:

> I didn't know I could still cuss [Laughing & Clapping] like I could cuss [Laughing & Clapping]. . . . I did not know that I could actually go down to the state of Texas and apply for a license for a pistol permit to carry, put it in my pocketbook , bring it to church, and sit it right down by my pew [Laughing]. Somebody say, lift your hands and say, "Refine me Lord." [Yes He will!] 'Til I got sick and afflicted and had to fight with the enemy, I did not know I still had the capability on the inside to make up my mind, excuse me, I'mmon kill a negro [Laughing]. Oh yes I am, I'mmon kill a negro and I'm just gonna go sit in prison and have a prison ministry [Laughing, Shouting & Clapping]. I didn't know it was still in me![100]

Copeland's confession reveals that a Christian, more or less a minister, can have impure thoughts as well as behaviors and still be a Christian. Her testimony comes in when she states, "I've learned how to pray. . . . [A] life of prayer becomes . . . sufferings' greatest reward. It takes me into an intimacy with God. . . . And, I found out when I learn in the midst of my suffering to pray, something called serendipity happens."[101] Copeland goes into another narrative, but this time about a poor mountaineer, named Jed, who eventually strikes oil. She professes, "[N]o matter what life means for evil, God's got a way of

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

turning that thing around and around and around!"[102] This story of Jed helps Copeland make the point that prayer "becomes suffering's highest reward."[103]

Copeland recaps for her audience the three points she has mentioned about prayer and then introduces a fourth point. She poses the question, "What can you do for us? Learn to pray because not only do you become a terror to the devil and does your spiritual life become refined, not only do you find a great reward for all the suffering that you've been through. But prayer, survivors, we can testify, is the saint's surest refuge [Clapping & Shouting]." By telling the story about the characters in Gunsmoke, The Rifleman, and Paladin, Copeland is able to compare prayer to being a refuge that will hide her and that she can duck under in times of trouble.[104] To further expound on this idea of prayer as a refuge for the saints, Copeland tells her final anecdote about a sickly little "street doggie" that was rescued from an alley by a veterinarian. The veterinarian washed her, stitched her up, de-wormed her, "de-fleed" her, gave her medicine, fed her, and gave her shelter and refuge.[105] The little doggie and the veterinarian develop a wonderful relationship. He tells the doggie, "All I want you to do little girl is just stay!"[106] However, one day the veterinarian could not find the doggie anywhere so he resolved that the streets had reclaimed his doggie. Then, some time later, there is a commotion in his front yard. Copeland says:

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[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

> Oh, as far as the eye could see, nothing in his front yard but yards and acres of doggies! And then, bless the Lord, right down the middle aisle, here came his little doggie [Laughing & Clapping]. Came up to him with her tongue hanging out. He said, "Where you been? I thought I told you to stay!" She said, "I know you told me to stay, but all the while that I was up here in the shelter and the refuge of your house, I kept on thinking about my sister doggies that still live down in the alley and I had to go and tell them that I found a man that likes doggies, that gives doggies a refuge, that heals doggies, that restores doggies to life again!

Copeland ends the story and the sermon with the following words, "What can you do for your sister? Don't forget where you came from! Don't forget the refuge that has been offered to your life."[107] She presents this idea of refuge as a fourth reason why saints should pray. However, the refuge, according to the story, acts as its own entity, a fourth call to action or remedy that serves to answer the question, "What can you do for your sister?"[108] While Copeland argues that she has three things that she picks up from the text, I argue that she really has four calls to action: a call for partnership; acknowledgement, validation, and understanding; prayer; and for us not to forget the refuge offered to us so that we can extend it to others. Copeland talked about refuge under the guise of prayer; however, her last anecdote communicated the need for us to "not forget the refuge that has been offered to [our] lives" and it was divorced from a conversation of about prayer.[109] Therefore, this plea for us to remember from whence we came and the refuge we have received stands alone as a fourth step that the audience members can take in answering the question, "What shall we do for our sister?" by extending what has been give to us, to others.[110]

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[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid.

In this sermon, Copeland has embodied the role of the little sister who has no breasts through the storytelling of her own experience with breast cancer in order to challenge the ways in which we view other people's struggles and the ways we respond to those struggles. Copeland also helps her audience to understand that they too represent the little sister in way she re-envisions what struggle symbolizes in the text. According to Copeland, the little sister signifies everyone—the sisters and the brothers—those with breast cancer and those without; those who are HIV positive, those whose child has been killed by a drive-by shooting, those who have had a heart attack, those suffering with lung problems due to smoking, those who have spouses that decide they do not want to be married anymore, and those who have business partners or friends that betray them.[111] Copeland presents an "intellectual indictment" to the myth, that "breast cancer only affects the one who has it." Her sermon offers the "perspectival corrective" that what affects one, affects everyone and so we need to join each other in their struggles. She transforms her audience's perception about sickness and struggle in order to collectively call them to action to help others.

*The Womanist Characteristics*

> According to Copeland, womanist preaching is an "embodied mediation." She argues:
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> "There is something about the body, the physicality of woman presence in the pulpit. In the way that I handle myself, my body, just the physicality of my presentation mediates for the listener, the brothers, for the women who watch my life. It says more than I can say. It affirms the feminine. I think I'm always conscious, when I come to the pulpit, of the way the visual speaks volumes to reinforce the auditory. Womanist preaching is more than just what we say; it is the presentation of our voice and our movement and in the best sense of the word, the drama of the feminine presence in the pulpit.[112]

[111] Ibid.

[112] Claudette Copeland, phone interview by Kimberly P. Johnson, March 16, 2010.

This "embodied mediation" that Copeland describes is a performative characteristic that allows the preacher to embody her argument. Robert Hariman's discussion about performative expectation helps us understand this dramatistic element in the pulpit. Hariman argues that performative "expectations involve both specific compositional details of the pertinent communicative art, and a general, dramatistic sense of how to move in the realm of appearances."[113] Throughout the sermon, we witness Copeland's negotiation of how she takes on the role of the characters in the sermon and how she uses her own personal experience to embody her argument. These "embodied mediations," which I also discuss in my examination of the "Hell No!" sermon from the previous chapter, are visually and audibly present in the embodiment of her argument through testimony, personal narratives, and anecdotes.

In addition to this "embodied mediation" characteristic, Copeland also demonstrates what M. Shawn Copeland calls a "critical cognitive praxis." In short, this type of praxis entails the questioning of patterns and experiences; testing and probing; gathering and weighing evidence against cultural codes, signs, and hegemonic truths.[114] We see this type of questioning in Claudette Copeland's sermon when she asks the question, "What shall we do for our little sister?"[115] This sermon allows her to create what Stacey Floyd-Thomas calls a "cognitive counterbalance, intellectual indictment, and perspectival corrective" to our understanding of struggle, our thoughts about who it

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[113] Robert Hariman, "Prudence/Performance," in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 22: 27.

[114] M. Shawn Copeland, "A Thinking Margin: The Womanist Movement as Critical Cognitive Praxis," 227.

[115] Appendix B.

affects, and our behavioral practices.[116] Her sermon counterbalances the initial idea that God is incapable of speaking through a breast—a female body part in a Sunday morning service, along with the notion that breast cancer only affects women—the women who have it. Copeland utilizes the breast cancer theme as a "perspectival corrective" to aid her audience in recognizing that what affects one, affects everyone. The person who is going through the sickness or struggle is obviously affected, but then Copeland advocates for everyone else to join the person in that struggle: to develop compassion and understanding, as well as to acknowledge and pray for the individual. The conversation about breast cancer becomes a "dialectic between oppression, a reflection on one's experience of that oppression, and a call to action that resists or eliminates the oppression.[117] Copeland's sermon calls everyone to a collective form of action by helping the audience comprehend that we all have important roles to play in each other's lives as we endure the pains of life.

Additionally, Copeland demonstrates a womanist characteristic that appears to be exclusive to this sermon, she balances her texts. The first text has a young lady as its focal character while the second text has Apostle Paul as the focal character. So even though she comes to talk about breasts and breast cancer, she balances the genders by using biblical texts that equally focus on both sexes. This balancing act furthers the scope of her target audience because it causes the sermon to be more inclusive of genders.

However, the point at which Copeland fails to reiterate womanist thought is when she assigns a masculine pronoun to God a total of three times. Do the four verbal slips

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[116] M. Shawn Copeland, "A Thinking Margin: The Womanist Movement as Critical Cognitive Praxis," 227.

[117] Ibid., 229.

discredit her sermon from being a womanist sermon? My response is "No" for two reasons. First, I believe the multiple characteristics of womanist thought exemplified within this sermon far outweigh these four masculine pronoun slips. Second, for a sermon that is one hour and eleven minutes in length to have just four verbal blunders when God is mentioned at least thirty-five times tells me that Copeland did not intentionally mean to image God as a male to her audience. If I were to penalize her efforts by discrediting this sermon as a womanist sermon, then I would have to discredit other sermons from other forms of preaching that fail to adhere to their rhetorical conventions.

## Conclusion: A Comparison and Contrast of Rhetorical Strategies between Critical Engagement & Traditional Communalism

The two major rhetorical similarities between the two types of sermons—the critical engagement sermon by Claudette Copeland and the traditional communalism sermon by Cheryl Kirk-Duggan—are that they both perform cultural critiques from a both/and vantage point of self and community, plus they call their audience members to a form of action. These similarities also illuminate their differences. Copeland presents a cultural critique of society's one-dimensional view toward breast cancer and she approaches the topic through the subjectivity of her own experience with breast cancer. Copeland's aim is to put forth a "perspectival corrective" to ways in which people view and react toward breast cancer, breasts, sickness, and struggle. Kirk-Duggan offers a cultural critique of what I consider an internalized oppression—a crippling spirit. Kirk-Duggan's aim is to enhance the community by first enhancing self, which is why she requires introspection.

While both sermons contain the notion, what affects one, affects everyone, with their both/and vantage point, they take different approaches. A critical engagement sermon shares the dual focus of self/community, but the difference is that these sermons are mainly concerned with targeting the community to change the community's behaviors and thought processes. Copeland mainly targets the women of the community, but she also demonstrates concern for those who sit outside the conversation of breast cancer and have no personal connection to breast cancer when she reimages, for her audience, what struggle looks like. Her goal is to change their view toward other people's struggles and even change their behavioral response. Then, in a roundabout manner, she targets self when she invites her audience into the biblical text as the little sister who has no breasts. Throughout the sermon, she poses the question, "What shall we do for our little sister?"[118] So, when she answers this question, she is also informing self on how the community is to treat self.

On the other hand, the both/and vantage point of traditional communalism sermons primarily target self in order to improve self so that self can be a more effective member of the community. The way Kirk-Duggan accomplishes this is by holding self accountable. She poses questions such as: "[A]re you willing to be free so that you can help others to be free?" and "What are we willing to do to be free from our 'bent overness?'" What will each of you do today . . . ?"[119] Additionally, Kirk-Duggan also targets the community by targeting Presbyterian women ministers, and her communal lens also shows concern for those outside of the community. She says to her Presbyterian

[118] Appendix B.

[119] Appendix A.

audience, “if you’re in a very wealthy Presbytery . . . and you’re doing go work there, well continue, but don’t forget that there’s a world out there dying!”[120] She cautions her audience to not forget about those who sit outside their community. Therefore, she is not only concerned about improving self so that self can be of a greater service within the community, but she wants self to also benefit those outside the community.

Similarly, the call to action of critical engagement sermons and traditional communalism sermons targets the same primary focus as their both/and vantage point. Critical engagement sermons offer a collective call to action that outlines what the community can do together to help fix/eliminate the problem. This communal target is important because Copeland has to answer the question, “What shall we do for our little sister?”[121] She suggest: partnership; acknowledgement, validation, understanding; prayer; and for us to not forget the refuge that has been offered to us—we are to offer the refuge that has been extended, to us, to others just as the little doggie did for all her doggie friends. In contrast, traditional communalism sermons put forth an individual call to action that will improve self and ultimately through self-improvement, enhance the community. Kirk-Duggan provides three challenges that will help us recognize if we are spiritually crippled. First, “[T]o look in the mirror and take a risk and get to see, do you really know who you are?”[122] Second, “[T]o take some Sabbath time to rethink the vows you took. And, to take another look at, “Who is God in my life? Who am I?” Not what you do, but, “Who are you? Who am I? And, what is God calling you to do today?”[123]

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[120] Ibid.

[121] Appendix B.

[122] Appendix A.

[123] Ibid.

Third, "[T]o look and see, what is your call and are you still interested? If you're not interested, then maybe it's time for you to do something different."[124] Although this call to action is very much self-oriented, it still has a communal slant because of the concern that "God's people ought not suffer because we're bent over, busted up, and burned out."[125] In the final analysis, traditional engagement sermons lend themselves toward devising a plan of accountability that will help individuals become more effective members of their community. Whereas, critical engagement sermons critique the social forms of oppression through an embodied mediation that challenges the ways we know, think, and act, as well as pose the question, "What can we do?"

In the final chapter, I provide a contextualized summary that diagrams the various rhetorical strategies, sermonic functions, and methodological approaches used by all five womanist preachers in an attempt to explain how the sermons transform/adapt the tenets of womanist thought.

[124] Appendix A.

[125] Ibid.

# CHAPTER SIX

## CONCLUSIONS ABOUT WOMANIST PREACHING

Through a close textual analysis of five sermons by five different self-proclaimed womanist preachers: Elaine Flake, Gina Stewart, Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, Melva Sampson, and Claudette Copeland, this dissertation has sought to answer to the question, how does womanist preaching attempt to transform/adapt the tenets of womanist thought to make it rhetorically viable in the church? And what is gained and lost in this? I have identified the major rhetorical strategies of the radical subjectivity sermons, the traditional communalism sermon, redemptive self-love sermon, and the critical engagement sermon used in this project. I have identified their adaptation of womanist thought by pinpointing their womanist characteristics. I have also discovered the major differences among these forms of preaching along with a few pitfalls that either venture close to male-bashing or accidentally assign a masculine pronoun to God.

This project, which is original work in the area of communication/rhetorical studies, has taken into consideration the existing scholarly materials of Katie Cannon, Donna Allen, and Elaine Flake that directly address womanist preaching. We have learned that the preacher must use imagery that will "invite the congregation to share in dismantling patriarchy by artfully and deftly guiding the congregation through the rigors of resisting the abjection and marginalization of women."[1] Therefore, womanist preaching must not only inspire people to action, but it must also carry the burden of helping people to recognize their participation in their own oppression; their own

[1] Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 120.

unhealthy relationships, attitudes, and behaviors; how they have strayed away from true authenticity; and how to reclaim their own voice.

## General Womanist Preaching Characteristics

As a result of this project, I have ascertained a number of womanist characteristics that seem to crossover the different types of womanist preaching. For example, Kirk-Duggan's sermon, "Women of the Cloth," culturally critiques the various "isms" that cripple people: sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, and faux churchism. Although her sermon demonstrates a sense of critical engagement, the primary aim of her sermon is for the communal healing of those in ministry. Hence her subject, "Weaving New Cloth: Confronting the Chorus of Bent Over Women."[2] Since sermons tend to weave in-and-out of the various forms of womanist preaching, I have derived my own typology of womanist preaching that reflects the crossover, or general womanist traits, found in three or more of the five sermons; which includes, but is not limited to the influences of Cannon, Allen, and Flake discussed in chapter one.

General Womanist Preaching Typology

1. Eliminates destructive female images and linguistic violence
2. Challenges patriarchy and androcentric language within the biblical text and our contemporary socio-context
3. Addresses the marginalization of women in the Bible
4. Uses non-gendered or inclusive language when discussing the Trinity
5. Makes use of identification to help the audience see themselves in the sermon and/or to develop their own value judgments

[2] Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, "Women of the Cloth," March 23, 2006, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Austin, TX (transcribed by Kimberly P. Johnson, see Appendix A).

6. Explores the liberating values within the Old & New Testament that affirm the humanity of women

7. Honors tradition and/or African ancestry

8. Identifies and resists all forms of oppression including linguistic sexism, heterosexism and homophobia

9. Culturally critiques the black church, the black community, and the oppressive aspects of this nation that continue to restrict women

10. Verbally and metaphorically avoids male-bashing through its use of imagery

11. Addresses violence on systematic levels

12. Employs methodologies that identify abusive, unhealthy toxic relationships

13. Empowers people to operate out of their own human agency to resist systems of domination and oppression

14. Conveys a message of hope and wholeness for self and/or the larger community

15. Historically reconstructs the biblical text and re-images biblical characters

16. Embodies the argument by privileging personal experience or embodies the biblical character by taking on the role of a woman in the Bible

17. Uses the artistic proofs of logos, ethos, and pathos to engage listeners critically

18. Shares performative attributes that are characteristics of both the oral tradition and traditional black preaching such as: call and response, repetition, storytelling, enactment and embodiment, role-playing, rhythm, and African American colloquialisms

19. Has a rhetorical agency or power within the message itself that guides its listeners to a particular end

20. Engages in pedagogical strategies of empowerment and critical thinking

This list is limited to twenty items for the simple reason that I wanted to base my findings on the sermons that this project has analyzed. However, if I were to include two more characteristics, I would add: 21) Presents Jesus/God as a Friend and Advocate for

women; and 22) Does not need to always address issues related to women, but it must convey a universal message that gives us hope, redeems, calls us back toward communal values, or empowers us to some form of action that will fix or help eliminate oppression. These additional traits are rooted in womanist thought, and Flake discusses certain aspects of them in her book. The reason number 21 is important is that by imaging Jesus and God as Friends to women and Advocates of women, preachers are able to ground their redemptive argument in the moral authority of the Godhead. I believe number 22 is vital to womanist preaching because it informs people as well as reminds people that womanist preaching does not always have to focus on "women." The same rhetorical strategies can be used to identify the oppressive forces in the text.

What we learn from the above typology about womanist preaching/womanist rhetoric is that it really is a social justice rhetoric that has been birthed out of and grounded in the authority of the African American female experience to critique and confront the oppressive nature of the community at large and more particularly, the black church. The rhetoric "interrogate[s] the social construction of black womanhood in relation to the African American community," the black church, and the Bible.[3] Cannon claims:

> In each preaching event, the religious practices and deep seated theoethical beliefs of the Black church are reinvented in and through specific scriptural interpretation. Investigation of the integral connection between the preacher who creates the sermon, the sermon's internal design, the world that the sermon reveals, and the religious sensibilities of the congregation that are affected by the sermon invites us to a higher degree of critical consciousness about the invisible milieu in which we worship.[4]

[3] Linda Thomas, "Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm," in *CrossCurrents* 48, (Winter 1998): 488.

[4] Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 116.

Consequently, womanist rhetoric is used as a tool by which to reconstruct knowledge through its epistemological privilege of lived experiences. Thus, womanist rhetoric becomes a discourse of experience that "situates rhetoric as a site of struggle for inclusion and survival."[5] Womanist rhetoric addresses and identifies the marginalized and then it produces a rhetoric of resistance that defies those oppressive forces that have assigned people to the fringes of mainstream society. Furthermore, it possesses a rhetorical agency or transformative aspect that empowers women to operate out of their own human agency to act on behalf of self and/or community.

Majority of the sermons considered for this dissertation project reflect the above womanist characteristics. We have witnessed how the preachers address the marginalization of women by challenging patriarchy, naming oppression, deconstructing negative images of women, affirming women, re-imaging the text/biblical character, embodying the argument/biblical character, empowering women to operate out of their own human agency to change their situation, and by using non-gendered language to reference God. These traits appear to be the staple characteristics of womanist preaching not only because they emerge in majority of the sermons I examined, but some of them also surface in the typologies of Cannon, Allen, and Flake.

Now that we have fully recognized the characteristics of womanist preaching, what is gained or lost in transforming/adapting Alice Walker's four tenets? I believe we gain a lens that not only allows us to see into the life of the biblical character, but a lens that helps us to see into the life of the preacher as well. Womanist preaching gives women a license to embody their argument so that their audience will be able to identify

[5] Olga Idriss Davis, "Theorizing African American Women's Discourse: The Public and Private Spheres of Experience" in *Centering Ourselves: African American Feminist and Womanist Studies of Discourse* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, Inc, 2002), 38.

with them or the biblical character in their sermon. However, while I am able to recognize this strength of womanist preaching, I also think that we lose two important attributes. When we examine the radical subjectivity sermons, we see the "outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior of a woman," but we lose seeing the woman who is "Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one."[6] We lose seeing the sassy side of women. Instead, we see the women who are courageous enough to fight for their life—physical, spiritual, psychological, or emotional well-being. In terms of traditional communalism, we hear Kirk-Duggan challenge heterosexism by saying, "Heterosexism is a crippling spirit that fears God's gift of sensuality and sexualities."[7] But, she never comes back to this discussion on sexuality, which makes me wonder how much attention womanist preachers really give to the topic of sexuality? Although she, like Walker, acknowledges a mutual respect for different sexualities, I am still left asking, does womanist preaching direct enough attention toward liberating those who are sexually oppressed by fighting against heterosexism? My sense, from examining these five sermons, is that sexuality takes a back seat in the fight against oppression, and thus gets lost.

Since womanist characteristics do in fact crossover into the different forms or categories of womanist preaching, how can the preacher or listener tell if s/he is delivering or hearing a particular womanist sermon? Through my close textual analysis, I have discovered rhetorical strategies that are specific to the four categories of womanist preaching. Radical subjectivity sermons lend themselves toward moving the individual audience members from victim to victor. Its focus is on self rather than the community at

[6] Walker, xi.

[7] Appendix A.

large. These sermons document one's journey toward identity formation, self-love, and self-worth. Plus, they detail the moment of epiphany, all in an effort to authorize and encourage the audience to act on behalf of self as well. Traditional communalism sermons lend themselves toward some form of communal healing and communal remembrance to live out the Christian faith. In other words, it calls people back to their communal values. The focus is simultaneously on self and community because to successfully work at community, one must first start with self—one must improve self in order to improve one's relationships with others. Similar, to radical subjectivity, there is a newfound self-awareness that takes place. Redemptive self-love sermons lend themselves toward transforming the eye sight of society because it redeems the perception of a woman that society sees as shameful, whereas radical subjectivity sermons work at alleviating the shame that self feels from being victimized. Critical engagement sermons lend themselves toward culturally critiquing society's cultural norms through an "embodied mediation" that challenges the ways we know, think, and act, and poses the question, "What can we do?" These sermons always focus on the self and community, primarily community, because their goal is to devise a plan that outlines what the community can do to help fix/eliminate the problem; and explains what self can expect from the community.

**The Rhetorical Attributes of Womanist Preaching: The Four Models**

My research has helped me construct four tables that reflect the rhetorical attributes of womanist preaching that coincide with the radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love and critical engagement sermons used in this dissertation project. I have created these tables in an effort to benefit rhetoricians, public

speakers, listeners, womanist theologians, ethicists, and preachers. My fellow communication colleagues will benefit from having a framework that charts the rhetorical attributes of womanist preaching, which can also be used as a methodological approach to analyze other forms of womanist rhetoric and to determine which tenet the rhetoric they are examining mirrors. Listeners will benefit by finally having a framework that they can reference which will help them recognize whether or not they are hearing a womanist sermon, and if they are, this framework will help them in differentiating between the different facets of womanist preaching. Womanist theologians and ethicists will greatly benefit because of the mere fact that womanist preaching has been intuitive thus far, but now they will have a framework that details the rhetorical strategies and attributes of womanist preaching which will help them engage in pedagogical strategies of teaching and passing down the tradition of womanist preaching. Furthermore, this study gives them a framework that will help them to make sure that their own preaching reflects and reinforces womanist thought. I believe these charts will help preachers understand how to deliver a womanist sermon that reflects a particular model, what the goals are of that particular facet of womanist preaching, and what the rhetoric sounds like.

The following tables outline the rhetorical strategies, explain the purpose of each strategy, and offer a rhetorical example of each strategy. Each table identifies the sermonic focus on self and/or community, the overall goal/aim of the sermonic form, the oppression, the type of language used, specifies what type of agency the sermon encourages, names what the sermonic form values, and uncovers some of the themes that are addressed within that particular facet of womanist preaching.

**Table 1**
**Radical Subjectivity Sermons**

| Rhetorical Strategy | Purpose of Strategy | Example of Strategy |
|---|---|---|
| Focuses on self | To heighten maturity level—increase identity formation, self-love and self-worth | "God is calling for brave and determined women to adopt an attitude of intolerance for those things in their lives that abuse, confuse, and restrict." |
| Aim: Liberation | Moves a woman from being a victim to being a victor | "When she has a change of self-perception, she is able to move from a place of victimization to victory" |
| Identifies unhealthy relationships that consist of physical, emotional, and mental abuse. Pinpoint a woman's moment of epiphany | To affirm the power that exists in choosing to get out of destructive relationships | "Leah's emotional dependence upon Jacob robbed her of security and self-worth." "She experiences the inner power that comes with saying, 'Enough!'" |
| Uses fight/war language and imagery | To show the extremes of the abuse and the perversion of the abuser | ". . . she wages a deliberate and systematic attack on him," "bludgeon her to death," "crush or be crushed" |
| Encourages a rhetorical agency | So that women will realize and proclaim to themselves that they do not have to live in an oppressive situation | "I do not have to settle for less. I do not have to participate in my own oppression." . . . "Enough really is enough." |
| Sermonic values: Self-love, self-affirmation, self-worth | To affirm a woman's humanity in the midst of her oppression so she will stop looking for validation from others | "She finally realized that she couldn't make Jacob love Leah, but she could love Leah. . ." |
| Sermonic themes: Domestic abuse, rejection, bondage, subordination, patriarchal domination, insecurity, emotional dependence | To lead people to a type of self-transformation: physically, spiritually, and/or emotionally | "He cheats on her but makes her feel that his cheating, like his beatings, is what she deserves." "She is clear that her husband is not going to give up or change, so the only way she is going to be free requires her to change." |

**Table 2**
**Traditional Communalism Sermons**

| Rhetorical Strategy | Purpose of Strategy | Example of Strategy |
|---|---|---|
| Focuses on self and community—has a both/and vantage point | To push people toward improving self so they can improve their relationships with others | "I challenge you to look and see, what is your call and are you still interested?" "God's people ought not suffer because we're bent over, busted up, and burned out." |
| Aim: Healing and freedom | Moves a woman toward an individual healing and a communal healing | "Are you willing to be free so that you can help others to be free?" |
| Identifies our spiritual, pathological, and ideological infirmities along with our pathological behavior—performs a cultural critique | To encourage self introspection and inspire women to free themselves from their illness by no longer practicing their sickness | "Racism mocks and violates God's precious, magnificent color and cultural palate of peoples;" "Faux churchism limits our experience of God and condemns the experiences of others." |
| Uses a language of sickness and a Jeremiad language | To identify our current condition and what cripples self/community. Plus, it calls individuals/ communities back to their original values | "For you see, with all the 'isms,' each 'ism' cripples us in a very dynamic way;" "So the question is, are you living the message of the gospel before them?" |
| Encourages a human agency | Encourages individuals to make sure they are living the gospel message, so that the community as a whole can be the people God has called them to be | "To be church means discerning all the 'bent overness' and deal with them. Starting first with ourselves." |
| Sermonic values: Being the people of God, discerning "bent overness," freedom, salvation | To affirm a woman's humanity in the midst of her oppression so she will stop looking for validation from others | "We can't talk about being the people of God if we don't live the people of God." |
| Sermonic themes: Crippling spirits, embrace God's anointing, build community, let go of brokenness | To lead people to a type of self-transformation: physically, spiritually, and/or emotionally | "How can we transform our passive aggressive behavior born out of patriarchy and misogyny? We must expose our internal societal oppressions if we want to be well." |

**Table 3**
**Redemptive Self-Love Sermons**

| Rhetorical Strategy | Purpose of Strategy | Example of Strategy |
|---|---|---|
| Focuses on one's ability to love herself regardless and the community's perception of her actions | To praise women who love themselves enough to resist being silenced or losing their dignity or self-worth so that it can begin to change society's negative perception of those women | "But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command . . . Queen Vashti's response often is overlooked for the more palatable story of Ester." |
| Aim: Redemption | Removes the socially perceived shame of a woman away from her actions | "Vashti's metaphorical response . . . became a model for all the women in Susa and a threat to those who would have found pleasure in her debasing display." |
| Identifies leadership qualities in women who are regarded as shameful, wicked, and/or evil | To reveal the life-altering decisions that we will have to face when we are forced to choose between honoring self over our social position | "We will all one day be summoned to the king and be forced to choose between a mealy-mouthed yes and an emphatic 'Hell no!'" |
| Uses provocative language | To encourage women to go for the shock-and-awe value by matching their actions and decisions with an emphatic oral response | "Hell no!"p27<br>"I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired;" "If I perish let me perish" |
| Encourages a rhetorical agency | Empowers a woman to match her human agency and moral agency with a rhetorical agency—an emphatic verbal response | "I think of Nez, who, if she had been with Vashti . . . surely would have looked at the queen and given her the royal nod to repeat after her and say, 'Hell no!'" |
| Sermonic values: Self-love, self-acceptance, self-development, revolution, reverence for one's self, righteous indignation | To affirm women in listening to their own voices in order to be true to self | ". . . the sound of the genuine within one's self is paramount"p28<br>"Outward success is not equal to inner worth" p30 |
| Sermonic themes: Objectification, silence, exile, pride of the powerful, patriarchal dominance | To encourage a woman not to submit to quiet conspiracy and lead them to actually start a revolution that reverences self by honoring the divinity that is inside of her | "A simple answer of 'No thank you,' or 'I'm sorry, I'll pass' just doesn't get it. We need to go for the shock-and-awe value and retrieve our voice, our power, and our bodies." |

**Table 4**
**Critical Engagement Sermons**

| Rhetorical Strategy | Purpose of Strategy | Example of Strategy |
|---|---|---|
| Focuses on self and community with a both/and vantage point—but, primarily focuses on community | To push people to confront their internal system of beliefs in order to build community so they can collectively combat the external system of beliefs | "Cancer is not contagious, you can't catch it. I need partnership while I go through." |
| Aim: Joining in the struggle | Moves people toward partnership | Asks: What shall/can we do? |
| Identifies society's normative view of oppression via its own cultural critique of a particular situation | To challenge the ways in which we view other people's struggles by offering a "perspectival corrective" | "There's a rat trap in the farm house and if affects the whole farm" B.3 (What affects one, affects everyone) |
| Uses erotic/scenic language and medical terminology | To help the audience recognize their own hypocrisy, identify with the biblical character, and intellectually understand the affliction/oppression | "Breasts, a complex landscape," "highway system of complex ducts," "a waterway of lymphatic fluids—breasts. Don't you dare sit here . . . and act like you are embarrassed by the conversation . . ." |
| Encourages a human/rhetorical agency | Inspires people to collectively change their thoughts and behavioral practices so they can help fix/eliminate the problem | "What shall we do for our little sis? . . . if you want to do anything for your little sister": Partnership; acknowledgement; validation; understanding; prayer |
| Sermonic values: Prayer, joining others in their struggle, acknowledgment, understanding, compassion, doing for others, sharing our refuge | To affirm the power of prayer and the power one has through prayer | "I need somebody who can . . . say, 'I bind the power of sickness and disease. You gonna live and not die." "A saint who will pray is Satan's greatest nightmare." |
| Sermonic themes: Breast cancer, struggle, wounds of the flesh, wounds of the spirit, becoming invisible | To reassure people who are struggling that Jesus has prayed for them and is with them, and to lead people emulate that same type of behavior toward each other | "I heard Jesus say, . . . 'I have prayed for you!' When people forget you, . . . are embarrassed by your suffering, . . .walk a wide circle around you, this is your comfort . . ." |

## Future Research

While this project unlocks the rhetorical strategies used in womanist preaching, it is only a starting point. Similar to the way Donna Allen built on Katie Cannon's work, this project has allowed me to build on their efforts along with the work of Elaine Flake and Stacey Floyd-Thomas. Plus, it opens the door for someone to build on the work I have presented and for me to do further research to uncover whether or not there are more facets of radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement preaching that this dissertation has not considered.

What I have discovered through my close textual analysis is that identification and agency are two key components within womanist preaching and womanist rhetoric. The womanist preacher becomes a facilitator of agency by identifying the audience with the biblical text. Therefore, as opposed to taking a neo-Aristotelian approach, it might behoove a rhetorician to take a dramatistic approach that identifies the five categories of dramatism (act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose). The act distinguishes "what took place, in thought or deed," the scene provides "the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred," the agent "indicates what person or kind of person . . . performed the act," agency identifies the "means or instruments" that were used, and the purpose explains why the act was done.[8] A dramatistic approach to examining these womanist sermons will help to uncover a deeper understanding of the motive behind the rhetoric.

The next phase of my research will be to survey a much broader spectrum of womanist preaching to see if the tables that I have constructed will change, evolve, or sustain themselves through time. Does age or denominational affiliation play a role? Or, do age and denomination get trumped by womanist thought? Once I ascertain various

[8] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), xv.

continuities from the larger sample, taking into consideration other variables such as age and denominational affiliation, I will attempt a dramatistic approach toward the study of womanist discourse. I would also like to take a closer look at what it means to use cultural artifacts as sacred texts? I am really struck by how Flake and Stewart use a movie and how Sampson uses a musical as their sacred text. If one uses a cultural artifact, then what advantages/disadvantages does the preacher have when the cultural artifact is already a womanist text? Additionally, I would like to engage in more research surrounding the essentialism vs. particularity argument so that I can become part of that conversation. As I said, this is the starting point, but the end goal is that womanist preaching, womanist rhetoric, and womanist criticism will be acknowledged in all the major academic disciplines as a viable discourse and methodological approach.

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## APPENDIX A

### Cheryl Kirk-Duggan's sermon, "Women of the Cloth"
### Luke 13:10-13

Delivered, March 23, 2006, at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 100 E. 27th Street, Austin, TX 78705 (512) 404.4800

Good morning. Listen to the words of God from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 13, verses 10-13. *"Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then, there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, '"Woman, you are set free from your ailment."' When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God."* The Gospel of the Lord [People respond, "Thanks be to God"].

From this pericope, I take the subject, "Weaving New Cloth: Confronting the Chorus of Bent Over Women." And from that, in the Good Bob Shelton tradition of homiletics, I have my thesis: "Each moment we have an opportunity to shift from being busted and bent over to embracing God's anointing as we let go of our brokenness, dream dreams, listen to prophetic voices, and build community." Let us pray…

[She sings the following hymn, "There is a Balm in Gilead," with an operatic voice]

There is a balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole
There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the sin sick soul
Sometime we feel discouraged
And think our worth's in vain,
But then the Holy Spirit
Revives our soul again

There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the sin sick soul
There is a balm in Gilead
To make us wounded whole

Again, greetings! And it is such an honor and privilege to return to Austin Seminary, where I first showed up a week after my second call. Cuz, the first time God called me, I said, "No way! If this really is you, you're going to have to do this again." [Laughter] And God did, and a week later I was here on campus wondering what I had gotten myself into. So, I'm very grateful to the committee for this invitation. To Dr. Ted Wardlaw, we met in the hills, the mountains rather, of Washington and what a fine president at this august institution; faculty, staff, students, friends from the community, blessing to be in this place with you.

When we look at this text, it's clear that the woman is bent over. Perhaps she was physically bent over. But the text says, that she was bent over by a spirit. ***Point one***: Sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, faux churchism, and skewed traditions cripple and bust the joy, an image of God, in God's people.

The woman had a crippling spirit. It was stopping the manifestation of God in her life. We can imagine that she knew no joy, that she was tired. We can imagine that she was a poor seminary student who was confused and…and had difficulty in exegesis [Laughing] and wasn't too clear about what it meant to be a Presbyterian in 2006 [Laughing]. She might have been a Presbyterian woman on the journey for 20 or 30 years and still trying to figure out, "God, was this your joke on me? [Laughter] What's going on? I don't quite get it." "In many respects, the church has gone backwards from where it was when I first said that I had a call, accepted it, when I had to go before the session and had to take ordination exams, what's going on?"

Well you see, most people in the world, including church people and seminary professors, are bent over. For it is sometimes that we think because we have accepted Jesus as Lord, because we've been blessed to have communion and study and learn, that we don't have issues. Beloved, we all have issues [Amen]. Some of us are better at hiding them than others [Laughter]. Some of us are less bent over than others. Some of us are quite delusional [Clapping & Laughter]. And we think that we are really cool, and we've gotten over, and people don't really see us, see who we are. So I challenge you, to look in the mirror and take a risk and get to see, do you really know who you are?

For you see, with all the "isms," each "ism" cripples us in a very dynamic way. Sexism is a crippling spirit that violates and needs to control gender. Heterosexism is a crippling spirit that fears God's gift of sensuality and sexualities. Racism mocks and violates God's precious, magnificent color and cultural palate of peoples. How dare we not like someone because of the color of their skin. When you think about it, it must really grieve God and it really makes us quite stupid [Laughter]. Classism violates and has disdain for the poor and those with less status. And let us be really clear, we don't really want the poor people from the wrong side of the track, who may be a little smelly, sitting on those pews that my mama, or the group from the session, bought for this church. After all, this is First Presbyterian Church; we have our standards [Laughter]. And I tell you, because of that attitude, not only in Presbyterian, but Catholic, and Baptist, and Methodist, and all kinds of churches, Jesus would not be welcomed if he showed up on Sunday. Because faux churchism limits our experience of God and condemns the experience of others.

You know, it makes me laugh and cry at the same time when I think about all the folk who say, "It's my way or the highway!" What makes a person so arrogant that he or she thinks, and they have the audacity and the gall to say, "My way or the highway?" They're very big hypocrites and they're not really clear about the theology, often times, that they espouse because if God is so great, as many of these folk claim, then why couldn't God choose to anoint various persons with various visions of ways to do church?

In some of this faux churchism and faux, you mean like faux fur—false church—we are hurting more than we are helping. It would benefit and behoove many of us to hang up our Bibles and stoles and perhaps go out in the desert or go to a retreat center and get clarity. And so I invite, this is my second challenge, all my preacher friends and teacher friends to take some Sabbath time to rethink the vows you took. And, to take another look at, "Who is God in my life? Who am I?" Not what you do, but, "Who are you? Who am I? And, what is God calling you to do today?" For, if you knew that today was the last day of your life on this planet, what would you be doing and what kind of minister would you be?

***Point two***: Many of us are bent over by circumstances, fear, and family pathologies.

In many instances, women are where we are today and our churches are where we are . . . where they are today because of the other women—it's not so much the men keeping us down. For, if there are churches where women cannot be ordained or have leadership capacity, as I often tell my good Baptist and Catholic women friends, I would dare them, two Sundays in a row, just two, to not show up and to not spend a dime, to not send that tithe, and you want . . . you think Joseph Smith had a revelation, it would be no kind of revelation [Clapping, Laughing, and Shouting]. It would be no kind of revelation

compared to what would happen in the American Baptist, Southern Baptist, and the Roman Catholic Church. Pope Benedict would have to make a new encyclical in a heartbeat [Laughter]. Because without women in the church, we do not have church.

But the problem is, because of patriarchy and misogyny, we as women have been so bent over for so long that we've learned how to play the game of being passive aggressive. You know, we tell our brothers, our fathers, our husbands, over pillow talk, "Well, honey, I think you know. What do you think about having a new youth program? Well, don't you think that it would be really great for our Presbytery?" We tell them in a way to make them think that they thought it up [Laughter]. And then, they'll bring it to the church, the Presbytery, and the next thing you know, we have this wonderful new ministry and it was her idea. Well, now that we have more women in leadership places, what happens is that we haven't learned how not to do the passive aggressive thing. And since we haven't learned how to do that, we are often very catty among women.

Many of us, as women, are closer friends with men than women because men, often times not all the time, but men often times will listen. They will help you decide what you need to do and if you have a fight, you have a fight, and then you go on. But many times, we women, we have a fight and we wanna hold on to it. "Well, twenty years ago, they didn't let me preach at Austin Seminary and I haven't been happy since and I'm not gonna send any money for alumni fund and they can ask me all they want [Laughter]." Or, "So-and-so didn't show up for my ordination. So-and-so is talking to Sally and she didn't talk to me at the Women in Cloth Conference. And you better, huh, you'll be surprised the next time she asks me to do something and I will just conveniently not be available." That is the games that women play. I'm just telling the truth. I'm just

telling what I've seen. Doesn't matter race, doesn't matter age, I've watched little girls, I've watched older women play the same ridiculous games. We cut each other's throat. We backbite. We humiliate. That is not what Jesus would do. And the church cannot move forward until we name, what I call patriarchal sexism. And it's in the Academy too.

I've had some of my most difficult times with women who were already in the Academy and should have known better. But, they didn't cuz they were so bent over from the pain that they went through as students during their doctoral programs that they didn't know how to relate to me, so I proved a threat. I didn't look like them. I didn't sound like them. And that was intimidating, so they had to try to cut my throat. But, what they didn't realize is I have a cloud of witnesses in glory and a cloud of witnesses here. And so do you! [Shouting] And therefore, I fear no one!

I'm up here because of the invitation, but the invitation was given because God called me to preach and teach, I really wasn't interested [Laughter]. And I challenge you [Laughter continues], I challenge you to look and see, what is your call and are you still interested? If you're not interested, then maybe it's time for you to do something different. God's people ought not suffer because we're bent over, busted up, and burned out.

For you see, Jesus did not condemn the bent over woman, but he saw her and he named her freedom. How many times have we seen people bent over due to depression, drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, and we refuse to acknowledge them? How many times do you go to the grocery store and act like the cashier is an extension of the cash register?

Have you ever thanked the garbage men for picking up your garbage faithfully? God's church cannot be the church until we name the bent overness and help to set people free.

Many women remain bent over because of their patriarchal and misogynistic conditioning. They've never gotten over the fact that they're not the son that their dads wanted. They've not got the healing and therapy that they needed because they were molested or raped. They've become bitter and so bent over like . . . when they stand up straight, it's still like they're bent over touching their toes. And, when you're bent over and touch your toes, you cannot see what's before you. You can only see what's beneath and behind.

To set people free is the fundamental key of salvation. I think many of us Christians get it wrong when we have people worrying about what's going to happen when they die. Well, we don't know what's going to happen when we die. Scripture gives us about 3 or 4 iterations about what might happen. But you know, there's not a lot we can do about it. Are we helping set people free today? And it's not enough to teach and preach Jesus is Lord because if their stomachs are growling too loud, if they're hurting too bad, the noise of their pain will drown out any message of the gospel that you preach. So, the question is, are you living the message of the gospel before them? If we do not live the message of the gospel, they will not, cannot, be able to hear the message of the gospel.

Isn't it interesting, Jesus did not sit down and write ten volume set of dogmatics [Laughing]. Jesus said, they're hungry, let me kind of multiply some of this fish and bread. They can't see, let me slap some mud on their eyes so they can. What are you doing to feed the hungry—spiritually hungry, physically, mentally, emotionally hungry?

Freedom is more than eschatology, it is lived reality. So, are you willing to be free so that you can help others to be free? Are we willing to allow everyone have a voice? Or, do they only need to be Presbyterians with a lot of money with the right kind of clothes, driving the right kind of car? Or, are we willing to set others free? Or, do we have a need to control them?

***Point three***: as friends, faculty, staff, and students of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, let us press on to embrace the legacy of women who hear the call of God and experience ordination to a variety of ministries. As we choose to be set free in Christ Jesus, as we name the pathologies, and work for justice through the power of the Holy Spirit.

To be church means discerning all the "bent overness" and deal with them. Starting first with ourselves. Some of us are running so hard, we can't see straight, get enough sleep. Some of us are eating things we ought not to eat, drinking things we ought not to drink, and buying stuff we cannot afford. Stop it! [Laughter] Cuz, when you do that you are practicing your illness, your sickness. That is pathological, that is not salvation. So, your ordination certificate may be framed and gilded in gold. You may have put aside a nice retirement plan, but if you are in prison to drugs, alcohol, to people, to people's opinion of you, to getting a big church, to having a big car, all that stuff, you aren't really saved, cuz you're not really free. How bent over are we? How bent over are the women in our lives, the children in our lives? When was the last time that your Presbytery really dealt with the fact that they are building jails, right now, based upon the third grade population across the United States. When was the last time you had a Native person or a Hispanic or an African American person preach at your church? Teach at

your church? How many of you all have Black neighbors or Brown neighbors or Asian neighbors that you really talk to? We can't talk about being the people of God if we don't live the people of God! I'm just saying, let's get real.

Now, you know, if you're in a very wealthy Presbytery, very wealthy parish, and you're doing good work there, well continue. But, don't forget that there's a world out there dying! And seminary students, don't forget, this is a privilege you have being here. So stop all the moaning and groaning! Nobody has an oozy or AK-47 at your head saying you got to be here! [Shouting] So, if you're going to be here, choose to be here, choose to learn. You'll get over your stuff! Faculty, if you're not reading new books, learning to teach in new ways, using blackboard, traveling, making things problematic for yourself, get over it, wake up! It's a privilege to teach. It is a gift to teach and if you're a smart professor, you recognize that. You are a teacher / learner, you don't know everything. You can't know everything, even if you had ten PhDs because you still have not mastered every language in the known world. Therefore, you don't know everything [Laughing]. And smart professors know that. Now, I mean . . . I know that all the professor here at Austin Seminary, Sally, are smart [Laughing]. I'm just saying what I'm saying [Laughing]. And I'm just passing that on so you all can share with some of your friends who are bent over [Laughing continues].

But, what about your session? Your Presbytery? How can we transform passive aggressive behavior born out of patriarchy and misogyny? We must expose our internal societal oppressions if we want to be well. We cannot afford to engage in intellectual masturbation about the reality of what's going on in the world when people are dying. Now, I love to wax eloquently with theory, but if my theory cannot somehow be

converted to praxis, I'm in trouble and I'm not helping anybody. I might feel good about myself, but you can only naval gaze for so long before it gets boring. And, I know that's not what God called me or us to do. So what are we willing to do to be free from our "bent overness?" What will each of you do today, not tomorrow because you may be dead tonight? And this is not about fear, this is about wake-up! So, what are you willing to do today to speak truth to power? In the words that Dr. Cynthia Campbell mentioned this morning, she said, "We are bent over when others are silenced around us and when we do not pay attention to race and class and culture." Beloved, this is our day—tomorrow, standing up straight, tomorrow grace, tomorrow freedom, tomorrow love. What are you willing to do for there is a balm in Gilead? God bless you (Amen).

## APPENDIX B

### Claudette Copeland's sermon, "What Shall We Do For Our Sister?"

### Song of Solomon 8:8, Romans 15:30

Delivered, October 7, 2007, at Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church, 70 North Bellevue, Memphis, TN 38104 (901) 729-6222

Come on and clap your hands in this place if God has changed anything for you [Clapping]. I said, clap your hands if God has changed anything for you [Clapping]. [She starts to sing her words] Come on and open your mouth [Shouting] and give him glory if God has changed anything for you. Ahhhhhh . . . changed it, changed it, changed it, changed it, changed it. I'm glad he changed it. When I could not help myself, he changed some things for me. Hallelujah, thank you Jesus. And now, I'm stronger than I've ever been [Clapping]. I'm stronger [Shouting] than I've ever been. The devil thought he had me [Shouting & Clapping]. He never thought I'd win. But, this morning I'm stronger than I've ever, ever been [Clapping] since the Lord changed some things for me. I said, I'm stronger [Shouting & Clapping] than I've ever been! This morning I'm stronger than I've ever been [Clapping & Shouting]. The devil thought he had me. He never thought I'd win. I know what ya'll heard about me; but, I'm stronger than I've ever, ever been. You can look at me if you want to, but I'm better than I've ever been.

This morning I'm better than I've ever, ever been.
I have no complaints.
I have no worries.
I'm not frustrated.
I don't care what you think about me.

The devil thought he had me. Didn't intend for me to win at all, but I tell you I'm better than I've ever been.
Touch three people and say, "Now!"

Glory be to God forever. Kurt Karr is a terrorist [Laughing]! The F.B.I. is outside now. They will be waiting to take you into custody.

Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church, what a joy it is to be back here with you again after I think about ten years, it's been about ten years since I've had this privilege to grace this wonderful place. Pastor Frank, thank you for opening your heart and your door this morning and causing it to be possible for me to share with this great congregation again. We thank God for the First Lady of this house. We salute you this morning [Clapping]. (Give me just a little less base in the monitor. Just give me just a little less base in the monitor this morning. I bring my own with me. A little less base in the monitor)

To all the clergy, the ministry gifts of this great congregation, to my good girlfriend, Rev. Dr. Valerie Bridgeman-Davis, and to each of you the Lord's people. To these wonderful hosts that have made it possible for me to be here today.

If you would join me this morning in considering a passage, blessed be the name of the Lord, my God, from the Song of Solomon. For those of you Bible readers who know where it is, help your neighbor find it. For those of you who are not frequent visitors to the text, it is right before the prophet Isaiah. I want to thank God today, my uncle is in the house. He was married to my daddy's sister for fifty years and he's here with his new bride, I do believe came up from Rush College. Uncle David are you here? Where are you? Where are you? Where are you? [He stands and waves his hands] I

bless you! Lillian, thank you for coming. Thank you for being in the midst of the house today.

SERMON

The Song of Solomon. I will look this morning at chapter eight. Just kinda nudge your girlfriend, nudge the one next to you and just tell them, "We gonna be here a minute" [Laughing]. The door is not locked, if you've gotta leave, we understand. Song of Solomon 8 and then we will notice for your theme scripture, Romans 15:30. Song of Solomon the eighth chapter and I will read from the eighth verse. Listen for the Word. The King James Version says:

> *"We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?"*
> The Message Bible says, *"Our little sister has no breasts. What shall we do for our little sister when men come along asking for her?"*
> Romans 15:30 says this, *"I urge you sisters by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit to join me in my struggle by praying for me."* This is the Word of the Lord, the people said, thanks be to God.

What shall we do for our sister? (Give me just a little less up here, I'm getting an echo in the monitor) A Rat went around the barn yard frantically. Yes, I said a rat [Laughing] went around the barn yard frantically exclaiming to everyone that she met, "There is a rat trap in the farm house." Well, she went up to the chicken and told the chicken, "Have you heard? I said, there's a rat trap in the farm house." Where upon the chicken said, "That does not concern me in the least," and went on about her way. The rat kept on frantically around the barn yard and met a pig and said, "Have you heard? There's a rat trap in the farm house." The pig said, "Well uh, I'm sorry, I'm not a rat; that does not concern me." Frantically, the rat kept on proclaiming and exclaiming to everyone she met. She met a cow and said, "Lord have mercy, did you know there's a rat trap in the

farm house?" The cow said, "that is none of my concern." Well, just a few days later, a snake got caught in the rat trap. When the farmer's wife went to investigate, the snake bit her and she got sick. Well, everybody knows what's good for you when you don't feel good, chicken soup [Laughing & Clapping]. Where upon the farmer rang the chicken's neck and proceeded to prepare chicken soup. Well, she lingered a good long time. The illness would not abate and neighbors from far and near came to sit with the farmer's wife and everybody knows that you got to feed visitors [Laughing & Clapping]. Where upon, he slaughtered the pig so he could have some barbeque [Laughing]. And bless God when the prayers of the saints did not avail, the woman finally died. And, when the out of town folks came and stayed a good long time and the food ran out. Well, you know where there's a funeral, you've gotta have something to eat for them and he butchered the cow. And the moral of the story is: next time a rat tells you there's a rat trap in the farm house, you better understand that it affects the whole farm. [clapping & Shouting].

Seven out of eight of you who sit here this morning will never be affected by breast cancer. You'll never be forced to experience the gripping fear when you fingers explore the terrain of your chest only to make the heart stopping discovery of that thing, that hard pea, that marble, that walnut size, that Robbin's egg mass that you had never discovered before. Seven out of eight of you will never make that dreaded trip to the physician's office to have the skinny needle biopsy, to have the wire inserted, to have the surgical cut-down. You will never have to wait for the pathology reports to confirm or deny your worst fear. The old saints used to say, "He's kept you from dangers seen and unseen." Seven out of eight of you will never have to lay down on a surgical table and feel like you are laying down in your chiffon only to come up from the surgical sleep

altered forever. Seven out of eight of you will never have to search the face of your partner to find a comfort you cannot provide yourself—to hope your wounds will be kissed and caressed. And I pray that you will not be among the women who search only to find in their lover's face revulsion and rejection, or simply the stunned helplessness when he sees an empty chest, a snaking scar in the place that he used to lay his head. Seven out of eight of you will never have to have this conversation with yourself. Most of us this morning, we engage in the conversation about cancer and bodily affliction and it's a, it's a *conversation*. And you nod politely and you feel some intellectual curiosity and down in your being you say, "Well thank God it ain't none of me!" But this morning, thanks to this man of God and these women of God in this great church, we came to tell you that there's a rat trap in the farm house [Shouting & Clapping] and it affects the whole farm. We have a little sister and she has no breasts? What shall we do for our little sister? One out of eight of us this morning is the little sister. And I came by this morning to have a conversation with you to tell you, I ain't going away, I'm telling you there's a rat trap [Clapping] in the farm house that affects all of us.

What a subject for a Sunday morning—breasts [Laughing]. What a conversation to have in a holy pulpit on a Sunday morning when I know half of you came in here, my God, to be encouraged, to hear that God's gonna pay your bills, God's gonna give you a husband, God gonna bring you out all right, oh. . . I know what you came for [Laughing]. This morning, we gonna talk about breasts [Laughing & Clapping]. If God can speak through a donkey [Laughing], if God can, c'mon here God's gonna talk to you this morning through a breast [Laughing]. Touch your friend and say, "Relax."

Breasts, a complex landscape of fifteen-to-twenty lobes within each one. Milk-holding receptacles exiting at a nipple—breasts. Highway system of complex ducts and thoroughfares—breasts. Struma, called fatty tissue and ligaments. Pectoral muscles, a waterway of lymphatic fluid—breasts. Don't you dare sit here this morning and act like you're embarrassed by the conversation because if I look at most of you closely, periodically, you try to show yours [Shouting, Laughing & Clapping]. And, for those of you who have nothing to show, I don't mean no harm, but the others of ya'll trying to sneak-a-peak [Laughing & Clapping]. Breasts, what a miracle of creation.

Breasts, we impatiently await their arrival when we're little girls. We proudly compare them when the buds begin to appear. Covered up in training bras [Laughter] sometimes when there ain't nothing in training [Laughter]. We compare them in adolescent bathroom moments—"What size you wear?" [Laughter] Come on ladies and go with me for a minute. Breasts, as young women, we display them like flags flown proudly in the wind. As older women, we kick them like burdens [Laughter & Clapping] scraping the ground [Laughter]. Breasts, oh come on you can laugh! We augment them when there're too little and we reduce them when they become too burdensome.

Breasts, in the common vernacular known by many names [Laughter]: jugs, watermelons, mosquito bites [Laughter], titties [Laughter], boobs. They get us attention. They interfere with us buttoning our clothes. They cut groves in our shoulders. They are the intersection between the maternal and the erotic. They comfort our babies of any age [Laughter & Clapping]. Breasts, they . . . [Preach Claudette] oh this is God, they literally sustain life. They satisfy the longings. Come on sisters, we wash them, we oil them, we powder them, we lace them, we liberate them. We harness them or we let them hang

[Laughter]. We admire them in bathroom moments assessing their usefulness and attractiveness to the latest man in our lives. They are fondled; caressed they are kissed and suckled [Laughter]. They are breasts. I can't get no help in here [Laughter]. They are, they are, they are lain upon for comfort. But mostly, after a while, we just settle in with them for a lifelong friendly companionship. That is unless one day we find out that our breasts are out to kill us.

The Song of Solomon is a celebration. It is a celebration of married love. It is an allegory of praise between a man and a maiden. For those of you who can't get with me, just remember here, just remember. It extols the beauty of sensual love and the wonders of the human body—The Song of Solomon. It is often said that "The greatest wounds are the wounds of the heart, the wounds of the emotions." But any woman who has undergone physical wounding, any woman that has undergone the wounds of the flesh, c'mmon just nod at me if you can't admit it. If you have ever been physically abused; if you've ever been slapped or hit; if you've ever been punched or had your hair pulled; if you've ever been kicked; if you've ever raped or sexually violated; if you have ever suffered disfigurement in your body—the loss of a body part, the loss of your eyesight, the loss of a limb; then, that person, that woman knows viscerally, that the wounds of the body don't just wound the body, but they inscribe themselves as wounds on the soul. The wounds of the body are inextricably bound up with the woundings of my spirit.

"*We have a little sister and she has no breasts*." What shall be done for our sister? "*What shall be done for her when men come to call?*" What shall be done for those of you who sit outside the conversation of breast cancer, but what shall be done for us? On the day when your blood test comes back HIV positive, what shall be done for

us? Your family on the day that your child is killed by a drive-by shooting, what shall be done for us? You better touch somebody and say, "us, us, us, us." When your heart attacks you because you refuse to get delivered from the hog maws and the pig feet [Clapping]. What shall be done for us when years of cigarette smoking and reefer smoking come to call [Clapping]. What shall be done for us on the day that you hit fifty and your husband comes home and says, "I'm trading you in for two twenty-fives [Laughing], I just don't want to be married no more." What shall be done for us? What shall be done when your business partner betrays you and runs off with the money? What shall be done when the best-friend, your covenant sister, that you thought you would grow old with betrays you?

What would anyone do for me on that day when I was thirty-eight years old at the top of my game? Preaching at all the right doors on all the best platforms. Living in the neighborhood that I wanted to live in and driving what I wanted to drive. When I walked in the doctor's office that day and he said, "Rev. Copeland, there is no good way to give you bad news. You have Infiltrating ductal andenocarcinoma, a kind of cancer that arises quickly, spreads quickly, and will kill you quickly." What shall be done for me? There comes a time when a Mercedes benz don't help [Clapping & Shouting]. There comes a time when I don't need another diamond or a Rolex watch. What shall be done for our little sister when men come to call? What shall be done for you when you ah… you were, you were, I was never cute. I wasn't cute. I wasn't cute. I didn't have no shape, I didn't have pretty legs, but I had hair. Come on Survivors! I hadn't bought the hair, I hadn't weaved the hair, it was my hair [Clapping]! I could swing it like the best of the girls. When a catheter is threaded down my superior vena cava comes out my chest and

for the next ten months I am pumped full of Adriamycin, 5-FU, and Cytoxin. What shall be done for me when I sit in the bathroom and wipe the last strand of hair off my head? What shall be done when I walk up in church hyper-pigmented looking like a dead woman with my head rag on watching all of the daughters in the church beginning to audition for my job? [Shouting] "Pastor David, how are you, do you need a pie? Do you need somebody to cook for you?" I'm over there sick and dying, but "Pastor David." Parenthetically, letting him know that she still had two breasts [Tell the story! Tell the story!]. What shall be done for our little sister?

Well, I know that we've got to go to lunch and I've got to get a plan. The Romans text that you all chose for your background scripture today says, Romans 15:30, "That I urge you by the Lord, Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, join me in my struggle by praying to God for me!" Couple of things I want to leave with you today, I don't know if you're going to be happy or not. But there's a rat trap in the farm house. What shall we do for our little sis? The first thing that I pick up in my experience both in life and in the text, is that if you want to do anything for your little sister, the first thing that we need from you is your partnership. Join me, when people are suffering and when they're struggling. How many of you know that sick folk become invisible [Yeah]? Ah, you don't know it, you on the sick list today, we gonna pray for you for about three weeks, but don't you stay sick too long [Clapping].

(Disk #2)

Cancer is not contagious, you can't catch it. I need partnership while I go through. Brothers, brothers, thank God for those of you who are not afraid of suffering [Clapping]. Thank God for a man who knows how to just take a woman in his arms and just rock her

[Clapping]. Thank God for a man who doesn't run to the comforts of somebody else's breasts when his own wife is losing hers [Clapping & Shouting]. Ain't nobody gonna help me in here [Clapping]. Thank God for courageous brothers who know how to go with you to the chemotherapy [Clapping] and hold you 'til it gets better.

What shall we do for our sister? Join with me in my partnership: wear the pink ribbon; give; run; walk; march; do what you've gotta do, but don't leave me out here by myself. That is the whole story of the incarnation when Jesus did not stand back, but he said, "Look-a-here, prepare me a body and I'll go down and I'll be touched and tempted at all points, just like you! I'll show you how to overcome in a body! Partnership.

The second thing that I raise up today has already been said. What can you do for me? Acknowledge that it's a painful struggle and that even though yours may not be like mine, validate me and tell me that you understand what pain is like. I know you're saved and Spirit-filled and been a part of the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church for fifteen long years and you have your Bible on your knees and you've marked all the correct passages, and uhh you're prominent in the things of God. But, behind your persona [Clapping], behind your title, behind your vestments and your preacher robes, somebody has got to tell the truth that pain has touched us all and kissed every one of us in the mouth [Shouting & Clapping]. You don't get so deep, you don't get so holy, you don't get so full of the Word where you cannot acknowledge that all of us got something [Clapping]. I can't look down on you and yours cuz you don't know mine. It is a painful struggle. The text that Paul says, "Join me in my *painful* struggle." Modern theology is a painless Christianity [Come on now!]. Modern theology is devoid of a cross, it is absent of a struggle. The media version of Christianity is what most of us have bought and

you're in the church now on sound bites. You're in the church now, chasing celebrity clergy [Clapping]. You're in the church now, my God, because you saw a picture in a slick magazine in a glossy photo and you said, "I'm gonna go up in that church and see can I get next to them." Modern theology offers us a painless Christianity. But, I came by this morning unashamed, stronger than I've ever been, to tell you that every life has a struggle—every celebrity, every society is bathed in struggle. Life is marinated in pain. It was Haiti yesterday, Darfur last night, Jena, Louisiana this morning. Every Christian in this society has a struggle. Yours might not be a disease, yours might be that you're broke [Laughing] up in here today looking good on credit [Laughing & Clapping]. Yours might be mental instability. If we catch you one day when you miss your medicine, we'd all be in trouble [Laughing & Clapping]. Somebody say, "painful struggles." Yours might be raising children without resources or respite. Aging parents that you're trying to care for, a loveless marriage. Struggles with sexuality, sexual choices, no sex [Laughing]. Struggles: moral failure and spiritual dryness; breast cancer; chemotherapy; disfigurement; radiation; reconstruction; fear of metastasis.

Life for none of us has been no crystal stair [Clapping]. And, I came this morning to tell you, that I would take nothing for the struggle. I wouldn't take nothing for my journey right now because my struggle, my God, has made me stronger! [Clapping] It has been in the midst of my struggle that I have been stripped of my own self-sufficiency [Shouting]. It has been in the midst of my struggle; you don't wanna have to talk to me, but I'm talking to you; that I have had to lay down my own arrogance [Yeah!]. I've had to give my ego and leave it at the altar [Shouting]. It has been in the midst of my own struggle where God has had to break my legs and leave me limping, but I'm leaning now

on an Everlasting Arm [Clapping & Shouting]. I said, there's a struggle going on for each of us, but I dare you not to run from the struggle! For it is in the midst of my struggle that God has done a new work in my life! [Shouting] Yes, if it were not for the struggle for some of us, struggle ran you into the church [Yeah]. You came into the church for relief from your struggle. Ah, but when you came looking for relief, God, by the Holy Ghost, gave you regeneration [Yeah!]—changed you, saved you, and delivered you! The struggle kept pushing you. It pushed you beyond your reach, pushed you beyond, come on here, your lovers [Clapping]. It pushed you beyond the alcohol bottle and pushed you all the way to the cross of Jesus Christ! [Shouting & Clapping] You better thank God for your struggle! [Clapping] Glory to God forevermore!

What can you do for your sister? Stop fronting and acting like you're immune and that I'm in this thing by myself! We have a little sister, I'm trying to hurry on. What shall be done for her? The third thing I want to raise up today is prayer. In the midst of all that's going on, Paul says, "Join me in my struggle by your prayers to God for me." How does a reality that begins with affliction end up with ability? [Clapping] How, how does a life situation that begins with, "I can't make it!" end up over here with, "I can do all things [Shouting & Clapping] through Christ that gives me strength"? [Shouting & Clapping] How does a reality bathed in despair and aborted hope and the tendency toward suicide, how does it transform itself over here, to now, "I'm more than a conqueror through Jesus Christ!"? [Clapping] I suggest to you that there is a conduit called prayer [Yeah!]. It is the privilege of the believer. It is the sanctuary of the saint. It is the refuge of the righteous. It is the comfort of the Christian, if you will pray.

But then, I remember, I remember, I was walking, I was walking in a major women's conference one day, Leo, and I was there with some of the "big name evangelists" and we were walking through this hotel packed with women everywhere and every few steps somebody would say, "Dr. Copeland, I'm so glad to see you!" "Dr. Copeland, your ministry is such a blessing!" praise the Lord, and we meandered on a few feet down through the crown then somebody else would say, "Evangelist Copeland, oh my goodness, I just love your ministry! I've read all your books!" Speaking of which, they out there in the hallway, ya'll better go get them after this service!" [Laughing & Clapping] Praise the Lord, and we meandered on through the crowd and we got nearly to the elevator, stopping three or four times, "Dr. Copeland," "Pastor Copeland, I just love your ministry!" And way… yonder cross, way…yonder, I heard somebody, Rev. Louisa, call out, "Hey Clyde!" Uh huh, I said, who up in here know me? [Laughing & Clapping] For you see, Clyde is what they called me in high school and college when I was more inclined toward Jesus than I was immersed in Jesus [Laughing & Clapping]. Clyde was who they knew when a little reefer was coming out from under the college dorm door [Laughing]. Clyde was who they knew when good and evil looked like twins and I got the wrong one right [Laughing & Clapping]. Ain't nobody gonna talk to me [Laughing & Clapping].

Jesus was talking to Simon Peter one day and he said, "Simon!" not Peter, not your public persona, not who the people know on the pulpit, not who's in the magazine and on TV, but "Simon!" your flesh man, personal man, the one up underneath the, oh come on here, the one that ain't got no breasts, or the one that's disfigured, the one that is apt to sabotage Peter if you let Simon out. He said, look-a-here, in case you don't pray

for yourself, and in case you can't get nobody else to enter into prayer with you, I heard Jesus say, "Look-a-here Simon, I have prayed for you!" When people forget you, when people are embarrassed by your suffering, when people walk a wide circle around you, this is your comfort, "Simon! With all of your disfigurements, with all of your failures, with all of your weaknesses," I'm talking to somebody in here today, "with all of your confusion about what is right, I have prayed for you!" [Yeah!]

I'm so glad I found Christ before I found cancer! I'm so glad I have an organizing principle in the midst of my life and it is founded upon the prayers of the Great High Priest, who sits at the right hand of the Father praying for me. Prayer, prayer, prayer, if you want to do something for me, let's join together in prayer cuz first of all, a saint who prays is Satan's greatest terror! [Shouting & Clapping] He is not afraid of believers, for the Bible said, "demons believe and they tremble." He's not afraid of church members. The Bible says, in Job 2, "When the folks came to Church, Satan came along with them and walked up and down trying to see what he could check out!" [Shouting & Clapping] He is not afraid of even you deep and wonderful people who prophesy and heal and do mighty works because the Bible said, "Jesus said, 'in that last day, some of ya'll, I'mmon tell you, I don't even know you, depart from me!" Satan is not afraid of the deep wonder, but he is afraid of saints who will pray! [Shouting & Clapping] Oh God, I don't have no help in here, but I know of what I speak! [Shouting] You are Satan's greatest terror! I say, I need you in my life. This is what I need you to do for me. I need you to have my back in the realm and domain where principalities still want to take my life!

Oh, Mighty God, I understand that when I got sick, I realized that I got good friends all over the country, but I didn't call the ones who were talking about, "Now I lay me down to sleep [Laughing & Clapping] I pray the Lord my soul to keep" [Clapping]. I had to call somebody that knew their way around the prayer room [Clapping]. A saint who will pray is Satan's greatest terror! For when you pray, my God, when you get up in the morning and put your feet up on the floor, demons begin to get discombobulated [Shouting & Clapping]. When you have been in the thrown room with God, oh…you can walk in and ain't got to say a word, you just change the atmosphere. A saint who will pray is Satan's greatest terror! [Clapping] Glory be to God forevermore! You see, he's afraid of you because when you pray, when you pray, when you pray, the Bible says, "The eyes of your understanding come open." [Shouting] When you pray, girl, you can see some things [Yeah!] There's nobody gonna help me, but I'm gonna help myself. I said, when you pray, you can see some things. Ah… I can discern spirits, I know whether it's an angel or a demon, I know whether it's human or Divine, I know whether it's going to be healing or death. When I pray I can see some things. Not only can I see some things when I pray, but my God, I can stop some things! [Shouting & Clapping] The Bible says, "Whatever I bind on the earth is gonna be bound in heaven." [Shouting & Clapping] When you pray, you become Satan's greatest nightmare! I don't mean any harm, but when we come to the altar, I don't need you to pat me. I don't need you to give me a Kleenex. I don't need you to pray pitiful prayers, but I need somebody who can boss some demons around [Shouting & Clapping] and say, "I bind your works. I bind the power of sickness and disease. You gonna live and not die." When you pray, you become Satan's greatest terror!

What can you do for your sister? Get a prayer life—you can see some things, you can stop some things, and you can set some things in motion! You can pull in some prophetic realities, can lay hold of some promises when you learn to pray. I've prayed for you that you will learn to join in this great warfare of prayer because you'll become Satan's nightmare, his greatest terror. Secondly, you'll become one of those who understand that prayer is self's greatest refiner. I did not know, somebody say, "refiner." I've been saved since I was fourteen, preaching since I was eighteen years old. I did not know until I got sick and I began to watch my body deteriorate. I did not know until I saw women start lining up to take my husband. I did not know what was still in me. I didn't know I could still cuss [Laughing & Clapping] like I could cuss [Laughing & Clapping]. Somebody say, "self's refiner." I did not know that I could actually go down to the state of Texas and apply for a license for a pistol permit to carry, put it in my pocketbook , bring it to church, and sit it right down by my pew [Laughing]. Somebody say, lift your hands and say, "Refine me Lord." [Yes He will!] 'Til I got sick and afflicted and had to fight with the enemy, I did not know I still had the capability on the inside to make up my mind, excuse me, I'mmon kill a negro [Laughing]. Oh yes I am, I'mmon kill a negro and I'm just gonna go sit in prison and have a prison ministry [Laughing, Shouting & Clapping]. I didn't know it was still in me! I didn't know it was still in me [Laughing]! I didn't know I could still be so angry with God [Preach], 'til I could shake my fists in His face. And say to Him, if this is how you treat your friends, I see why you have so few! [Shouting] I came to tell you that after you get finished railing and cursing God, after you get finished struggling against flesh and blood, finally you learn that prayer is self's greatest refiner [Amen!]. You'll find out that there are some

things you can do without now [Shouting] when you learn how to pray [Shouting & Clapping]. Find some people that left you, you can kiss them goodbye and not be mad because I've learned how to pray. You've learned that whether I had to give up a man or a body part, I'm still victorious in Sometimes I have an aversion to my own appetite, I'm appalled by my own actions, I'm smothered by my own suffering, but now, since I've learned how to get in the face of God, thank you Jesus! Woe is me, I'm unclean and undone, but he touches the coal to my lips [Clapping], sanctifies me, cleanses me, and refines me.

What can you do for your little sister? You can learn to join me in the struggle of prayer because by prayer, you become Satan's greatest terror! While you're praying for me, some things will start happening for you [Clapping]. Satan's greatest terror, ourselves' greatest refiner. Give me five minutes and we'll all go home together. But, when you learn to pray, you find that a life of prayer becomes, listen to me, suffering's highest reward. I said, it becomes sufferings' highest reward. It takes me into an intimacy with God. I have suffered, you will suffer, there is a sorority in this sanctuary this morning of sufferers of many kind. Satan has come to kill and steal and destroy, but Jesus, I came that you might have life [Clapping]. And, I found out when I learn in the midst of my suffering to pray, something called serendipity happens. I don't know, I don't know if you quite understand it, but you heard a story about a man named Jed [Laughing], poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed. Then one day, he was shooting at some food and up from the ground came some bubbling crude [Laughing], oil that is! I came to tell you that no matter what you're going through, no matter what you're doing without, no matter what life means for evil, God's got a way of turning that thing around

and around and around! [Clapping] Kin folk said, "Jed move away from there! Head for the hills, Beverly Hills that is." [Clapping] Why? Because that which has come against you is now getting ready to work for you! [Clapping] It becomes suffering's highest reward.

What can you do for us? Learn to pray because not only do you become a terror to the devil and does your spiritual life become refined, not only do you find a great reward for all the suffering that you've been through. But prayer, survivors, we can testify, is the saint's surest refuge [Clapping & Shouting]. Daddy and them used to watch *Gunsmoke*, *The Rifleman*, *Paladin*, come on old school folks [Clapping]. Somebody lift your hands and say, "refuge." And at the end of, every, every single episode when the good guy would try to get somewhere against the bad guy, he would tell his buddies, "You cover me!" [Laughing] Bullets are flying, but cover me! I got somewhere to be, cover me! Ya'll ain't talking to me! [Clapping] I need a refuge in my life and when I can't pray for myself, I need somebody with some loaded guns [Shouting & Clapping]. I need a refuge so I can duck up under there in the time of trouble, he will hide me! It is the saint's surest refuge. Stand up on your feet, I've got to tell you one more thing before we go.

What shall be done for our sister? One day, there was a little doggie, don't start walking you gonna miss the good part [Laughing], she lived in an alley with a lot of her girlfriends. She had been a street doggie for a lot of years. She was mangy, her ribs were poking through. Her ear was torn off from a whole lot of doggie fights. Somebody say, "refuge." She had that look over your shoulder paranoid doggy walk for a dog that had lived outdoors for many years. She scrounged in garbage cans trying to survive. She was

sick and she was dying. One day, one day, one day, down the street there was a gentleman driving a pick-up truck, he passed the alley and out of his peripheral view he saw a little doggie. He backed his truck up and looked down there, got gingerly out of his truck. Took a blanket from the back of the truck and tipped up on the little doggie and oh so carefully began to embrace her for you see, people who have been without help a long time sometime will bite you [Clapping] and misinterpret your intentions [Clapping]. He scooped her up in his arms and he put her in the back of the pick up truck. Oh, did I tell you that the man was a veterinarian? [Laughing] And, he took her home with him. Gave her shelter. Gave her refuge. And, he dipped her and washed the flees off. And, he put salve in her mangy parts. He sewed up the torn ear, de-wormed her and deflead her, and gave her medicine to help her live. Not only that, but he bought some Purina Dog Chow [Laughing], put some meat on her bones. By and by, the veterinarian and the little doggie struck up a wonderful relationship. He loved her and she loved him and he said, "All I want you to do little girl is just stay!" Got along for a good little while, she had the run of the yard, huh-huh-huh. Every time she saw him coming her little tail was wagging and oh, she was a happy little dog. And, one day the veterinarian got up and called for the little doggie, he could find her nowhere. He began to whistle for her, he began to call her by name. He walked up and down the streets knocking on doors, "Have you seen my little doggie?" He drove up and down the neighborhood to make sure she had not been run over and could find her nowhere. He said, "Well, maybe to his sorrow, the street had probably reclaimed his little doggie." Then, bless the Lord, a long time later. One morning he got up out of his bed and he heard a commotion all out in the front yard. My God, it was doggies everywhere!

[Laughing] It was big doggies, little doggies, Chihuahua doggies, Bull doggies, Pit Bull doggies, Collie doggies, Spaniel doggies, wuf-wuf doggies, and woof-woof doggies, big doggies everywhere! Oh, as far as the eye could see, nothing in his front yard but yards and acres of doggies! And then, bless the Lord, right down the middle aisle, here came his little doggie [Laughing & Clapping]. Came up to him with her tongue hanging out. He said, "Where you been? I thought I told you to stay!" She said, "I know you told me to stay, but all the while that I was up here in the shelter and the refuge of your house, I kept on thinking about my sister doggies that still live down in the alley and I had to go and tell them that I found a man that likes doggies, that gives doggies a refuge, that heals doggies, that restores doggies to life again!

What can you do for your sister? Don't forget where you came from! Don't forget the refuge that has been offered to your life.